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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 13 January 2021

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Orders, 4 June and 30 December 2020).

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

Oral Answers to Questions

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Covid-19: Disabled People

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): What steps her Department has taken to help tackle the disproportionate effect of the covid-19 outbreak on people with a disability.

[910489]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies) [V]: The Government are committed to supporting disabled people affected by the covid-19 pandemic. We are ensuring that disabled people continue to have access to disability benefits, financial support, food, medicines and employment support, as well as updated guidance in accessible formats.

Munira Wilson [V]: I thank the Minister for her answer. We know that in the last lockdown over half of families with disabled children found that their essential care support was stopped, with a third of parents reporting no specific support for their child's remote learning needs. That left many families in crisis with no respite. What steps are Ministers taking to ensure that both care and access to learning are made a priority for disabled children during this lockdown?

Mims Davies: The pandemic has been extremely challenging for families with children and young people with special educational needs. Supporting them is a priority for this Government and their wellbeing remains central to our response. We have our £37.3 million family fund to help more than 75,000 low-income families raising children. The hon. Lady will note that the Minister for children and families, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), is participating in this session, and I am sure that she will be keen to update her further.

National Autism Strategy

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the development of the new national autism strategy.

[910490]

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): I thank the hon. Lady for raising this important issue and congratulate her on all the work that she does for autistic people. We

are working across Government and particularly with the Department for Education to develop a new impactful all-age autism strategy. This will set out specific actions to address the significant inequalities that autistic people and their families face. We aim to publish the strategy in the spring.

Kerry McCarthy [V]: I was not really able to hear the Minister's answer, but a report from the Care Quality Commission in October last year was quite damning in its account of the experiences of people with autism and learning disabilities in mental health facilities. What work is the Minister doing—particularly in terms of the review of the Mental Health Act 2010 that we will hear about later today—to ensure that people with autism are treated sensitively when they end up encountering mental health services and having to spend time as an in-patient?

Helen Whately: I know that the report to which the hon. Lady refers, which was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, did indeed have some very serious findings. We absolutely will take action based on that report. We are also working on the Transforming Care agenda to ensure that people with learning disabilities and autism are not inappropriately in in-patient settings. There is, of course, also the reform of the Mental Health Act, which will mean that it should no longer be used for the detention of people with learning disabilities and autism beyond the 28-day period for assessment.

Covid-19: BAME Communities

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What steps her Department has taken to help tackle the disproportionate effect of the covid-19 outbreak on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

[910491]

The Minister for Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): My first report on the disproportionate impact of covid-19 on ethnic minority groups in October concluded that there is no evidence suggesting that ethnicity itself is a risk factor. Rather, the evidence suggests that a range of socioeconomic and geographical factors, as well as pre-existing health conditions, largely explained the disparities. The report set out the range of measures that the Government had put in place as well as recommendations to target those risk factors, which we are carrying out across Government. We are also working with stakeholders, including the British Medical Association and the Community Advisory Group, specifically in relation to adult social care.

Chi Onwurah: The disparities impact report did not say that race was not a factor. What it actually said was that data were not being collected. Has the Minister ensured that ethnicity data, including on test-taking, positive tests, vaccinations and deaths at a national and regional level, are being collected to enable the robust monitoring of the impacts of covid-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities? If she has, we will see whether her deep-rooted reluctance to acknowledge the role that structural racism plays is actually justified.

Kemi Badenoch: I am afraid that the hon. Lady seems to have completely misunderstood the report. I encourage her to reread it. There is no evidence to suggest that structural or institutional racism is the cause of the

higher infection rate among ethnic minority groups. In fact, data published by the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre shows that from September to December, the direct impacts of covid-19 have improved for ethnic minorities overall when it comes to the percentages of critically ill patients and deaths in England by ethnicity when compared with the first wave. We need to understand that this is a health crisis, and it is really sad that Opposition Members continue to politicise the issue and to look for racism, when medical experts have supported our report and shown what is driving these disparities.

Levelling-up Agenda

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to contribute to the Government's levelling-up agenda. [910492]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): We are determined that everyone in Britain should be treated fairly and have a fair chance in life, whether they come from Redcar or Reading. That is why we have a new approach in the Equality Hub that is focused on the scourge of geographic inequality.

Jacob Young [V]: The Minister knows that Redcar and Cleveland rely a lot on our chemicals, manufacturing and engineering industry, and, like me, many young lads in Teesside go on to study apprenticeships in our industry. However, there remains a lot of work to do to address the gender imbalance that faces our industry. What more can the Government do to encourage young people of all backgrounds, but especially young women, to access engineering and help to level up places such as Redcar and Cleveland?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We know that 35% of the gender wage gap can be explained by the different occupations done by men and women. I am delighted that he is doing a lot to support Teesside's chemical industry and to attract more young people, including women, into it. I am pleased to say that since 2010 there has been a 31% increase in the number of girls studying science, technology, engineering and maths subjects.

Covid-19 Vaccination

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): What steps she is taking with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to promote the take-up of covid-19 vaccinations among all communities. [910493]

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): What steps she is taking with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to promote the take-up of covid-19 vaccinations among all communities. [910498]

The Minister for Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): The Government are committed to ensuring that everyone who is clinically prioritised to receive a vaccine has access to one as soon as possible. As part of the Government's vaccine confidence campaign, briefing sessions are being held with community and faith leaders, with an expert panel of speakers taking questions and countering misinformation. That is part of an integrated campaign across multiple channels to improve public knowledge.

Robbie Moore [V]: A recent survey carried out by the Royal Society for Public Health revealed that only 57% of respondents from BAME backgrounds were likely to accept the vaccine, compared with 79% of white respondents. I know, based on emails that I have received from constituents across Keighley, that there is an element of nervousness about vaccines among the BAME community, so will my hon. Friend outline how she will increase efforts to support vaccine take-up among BAME communities and reassure all that the vaccines are completely safe?

Kemi Badenoch: The NHS will provide information to promote the take-up of the covid-19 vaccines among all communities, and will support anyone who has questions about the vaccination process. We are doing a lot of work across Government on this issue. We have had meetings with multiple stakeholders, including last week with the National Pharmacy Association, with which I and the Under-Secretaries of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) and for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) discussed options to tackle vaccine hesitancy among minority communities.

Rob Butler [V]: Disinformation about the safety of vaccines has caused great alarm to many people. This scaremongering is hugely damaging when mass inoculation is the route out of the current crisis and will enable us to return to normal life. What steps is the Department taking to work with other Departments to ensure that accurate information on the safety of vaccines is conveyed to communities for whom English is not their first language?

Kemi Badenoch: The vaccine confidence campaign is a cross-Government one, and it includes work to translate key messages and guidance into over 10 different ethnic languages across radio stations and publications. I reiterate my hon. Friend's point that vaccine disinformation is harmful and dangerous. It is everyone's responsibility to access information from authoritative sources and not to share misleading information. The Government are also working to help social media platforms identify and take action against incorrect claims about the virus and vaccinations.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP) [V]: Thankfully, we expect uptake of the vaccine among older people to be high, but uptake in that group of people is low when it comes to pension credit. The NHS will have face-to-face contact with almost every older person on these islands this year. I see an ideal opportunity to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to get the message across that billions of pounds-worth of pension credit is going unclaimed by older people. Will the Minister agree to meet to look at how we can do something about that?

Kemi Badenoch: The hon. Member's question is not specifically related to vaccines, so I will defer to DWP Ministers to respond and meet her to discuss the issue.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con) [V]: It is crucial that the vaccine confidence campaign is accessible to those with learning difficulties, those with hearing impairment, those with visual impairment, and those without English as their first

language. Will my hon. Friend please outline what the Government are doing across all Departments to make sure that the campaign is as accessible as possible to those who are among the least advantaged in our society?

Kemi Badenoch: My right hon. Friend will know that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation is giving advice on how to prioritise those most in need. The vaccine confidence campaign is specifically to do with vaccine hesitancy, which is not one of the issues that we have found among the groups she mentioned. We want to make sure that they are prioritised according to their need and vulnerability. However, I take the point that she has made and I am assured that that work is taking place across Government.

Equality of Opportunity: Children

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): What steps she is taking to help ensure equality of opportunity for children throughout the UK. [910494]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Vicky Ford) [V]: Spreading opportunity is a top priority across Government. That is why we are levelling up school standards, investing over £7.1 billion more in schools by 2022-23 than we did in 2019-20. We are committed to providing extra support for the education of disadvantaged children throughout the pandemic, including through our £350 million national tutoring programme; continuing to provide eligible children with free school lunches during term time; and securing over 1 million laptops and tablets, of which over half a million have already been delivered.

Peter Aldous [V]: Coastal communities such as Lowestoft face particular challenges in improving social mobility. I would be most grateful if my hon. Friend outlined the co-ordinating action being taken to ensure that all Departments work together to ensure that children in seaside towns have every opportunity to realise their full potential.

Vicky Ford: [*Inaudible.*]

Mr Speaker: Could someone answer?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): Clearly, what we need to do for coastal communities—as we are doing, working with the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford)—is make sure that childcare is available for every child. That is why we are, in particular, keeping early years open, and why the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is working to make sure that we protect jobs and create new job opportunities for those in coastal communities.

Economic Recovery: Employment for Women

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to ensure the adequacy of employment opportunities for women during the economic recovery from the covid-19 outbreak. [910495]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): The Government have taken significant steps to support employment opportunities for women, starting with

protecting jobs. The coronavirus job retention scheme has supported 4.5 million jobs done by women, the self-employment income support scheme has issued grants to 1.4 million women, and we are providing an extra £4.6 billion to support sectors required to close during the lockdown, which predominantly employ women.

Laura Farris [V]: Female employment is highest in the services sector and has been hit particularly hard by redundancies in hospitality, retail and leisure. The new deal announced by the Prime Minister in June focused on house building, road building and infrastructure—all vital sectors, but heavily geared towards male employment. Can my hon. Friend confirm whether there are equivalent plans to stimulate female employment in the months ahead, and will he meet me to discuss this?

Paul Scully: I thank my hon. Friend for what she is doing to encourage such employment. We are committed to a fair recovery for all. During the crisis we have rolled out unprecedented levels of support to protect jobs for both women and men. Yes, of course I would be happy to meet her to discuss what more we can do to stimulate employment, including female employment, in the months ahead.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): Research by the Trades Union Congress shows that about 90% of mothers have taken on more childcare responsibilities since the pandemic began, with 43% having to balance childcare with working from home. This is a particular pressure for single-parent households, the majority of which, research shows, are headed by women. With women at greater risk of redundancy and disproportionately employed in sectors hardest hit by shutdowns, will the Minister commit to creating a legal, enforceable and immediate right for parents to request paid, flexible furlough?

Paul Scully: Certainly furlough is available for women and, indeed, men who have childcare responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the employer to decide whether to give that, but if women feel unduly disadvantaged, they can approach ACAS.

Equalities Policy

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that her policies take a broad approach to equality beyond a focus on protected characteristics. [910497]

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that her policies take a broad approach to equality beyond a focus on protected characteristics. [910503]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): I want to make sure that the equality agenda moves beyond just protected characteristics. Instead, we will make sure that we are focused on every individual in Britain having a fair chance in life and fair access to public services.

James Sunderland: I really welcome the Government's agenda on women and equalities, and I commend my right hon. Friend for her outstanding leadership, but could I please also ask her to reassure me that we will never bow to those who suggest that white people should feel guilty for being white or to those who peddle

the notion of white privilege? We are in this together, so will she please undertake today to write to other Departments to reinforce that?

Elizabeth Truss: Britain is one of the best places in the world to live, no matter what a person's skin colour, sexuality, religion or anything else may be. We need to be positively empowering people in Britain to succeed so that everyone has access to opportunity, and not using positive discrimination. That is the approach we are taking right across Government.

Bob Blackman [V]: A very happy Lohri to the Dogra community, who are celebrating today. I agree completely with my right hon. Friend on the need to ensure that we move beyond the Equality Act 2010, but first we need to reform it. Will she bring forward proposals to remove caste as a protected characteristic from the Equality Act 2010, so that we can ensure that Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Muslim communities are not disadvantaged in our society?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Caste is not a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010, and case law has already shown that a claim of caste discrimination could qualify for protection under the race provisions in the Act.

Equalities Policy: Evidence Base

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that her policies are informed by robust evidence. [910499]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): We can and must have an equality agenda that is driven by evidence, and that is why we have launched an equality data project, which will look at the life paths of individuals across this country and deliver hard data about the barriers that people face.

Tom Randall [V]: Over the Christmas break, I was disappointed to read comments in *The Guardian* by Halima Begum of the Runnymede Trust, who ridiculously claimed:

“I think the government's long-term plan is to work up white nationalism for the next elections”.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that not only should that insulting thinking have no place in the setting of Government policy, but it should have no place in mainstream discourse?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree with my hon. Friend—these comments are appalling. They reflect an attitude on the left of politics that says, “If you're not from an oppressed group, you're not entitled to an opinion”, and I think that is fundamentally wrong. I believe that equality is for everyone, and I am not going to let this debate be dominated by a few campaign groups.

Topical Questions

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities. [910529]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): As we recover from covid, we need to make sure that everyone in Britain has a chance to succeed and is being treated fairly in the workplace. We are broadening

the focus of the Equality Hub from protected characteristics to equality for all and, in particular, tackling the scourge of geographical inequality. I will shortly be saying more about our new fight for fairness, delivering a better deal for everyone and standing up for fundamental human rights and freedoms across the world.

Tom Hunt: I very much welcome the fact that the equality agenda will be looking beyond simply protected characteristics. One key problem has been white pupils eligible for free school meals and how they have underperformed academically compared with other low-income groups. Does the Minister feel that the equality agenda we have been working with, which has been focused almost exclusively on protected characteristics, may be an explainer of why that is the case?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The attainment score at GCSE for white British children who receive free school meals is lower than the equivalent for black and Asian children. At the Equality Hub, we are conducting a life path analysis to understand where the real issues are, and we are working closely with the Department for Education to take action on this issue.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab) [V]: The impacts of 10 years of austerity are stark: 14 million people are now in poverty, figures out today show that 45% of disabled people in work at the start of last year reported no earnings by summer, and figures from the Department for Work and Pensions show that there are more women likely to live in poverty. In 2010, the Tory-led Government scrapped the Equality Act socioeconomic duty. Addressing class and other inequalities is not an either/or. Given the Minister's new-found passion for addressing class and poverty, will she now enact the socioeconomic duty?

Elizabeth Truss: We have made significant progress since 2010 in addressing disparities—for example, closing the attainment gap in education—but we recognise that, during the covid crisis, more needs to be done to address inequality and help to level up our country. The way we are going to do that is to focus on equality for everyone across our country, making sure that everyone has a fair chance—including addressing the issue of geographical inequality, which is severe in this nation.

[910530] **Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con) [V]:** The evidence shows that women face a significantly greater risk of violence and harassment than men in many aspects of their lives. To show their continued commitment to this issue, when will the Government ratify the International Labour Organisation's new global convention outlawing violence and harassment at work, and will my right hon. Friend join me in supporting UN Women's “Safe Spaces Now” campaign for better safety online and in public spaces?

The Minister for Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): We are finalising consultations across Government on the ratification of the ILO violence and harassment convention. Once those are complete, we will inform Parliament of our intentions regarding ratification. The Government share the “Safe Spaces Now” campaign's goals to see street harassment stamped out, and are committed to tackling all forms of abuse against women and girls.

Marsha De Cordova: In a speech last month, the Minister for Women and Equalities stated that she wanted to focus on “facts”, not “fashion”—she has made reference to that today—and to concentrate on “data and research”. The overwhelming body of evidence of structural racism is clear. It is a fact that black Caribbean children are more likely to be excluded from school. It is a fact that black women are five times more likely to die in childbirth. This is not fashion: they are facts. Does this evidence not point towards the need for action, rather than the continual denial and dismissal of the realities of systemic racism?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend the Minister for Equalities has already presented the clear evidence on the covid crisis. My point is that, rather than looking at equality through the prism of groups, we should be focusing on making sure that every individual in this country—regardless of their race, their background, their sexuality or their sex—has the opportunity to succeed. That is what the data project we are working on will look at.

[910534] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: I have been contacted by a WASPI—Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—woman who is a carer for her severely disabled ex-partner. She stopped work in 2019 due to his escalating care needs and was awarded carer’s allowance. When she finally received her state pension after decades of paying into the system, she was shocked to find that she was no longer eligible for carer’s allowance. How can it be right that when they hit pension age, carers—72% of whom are women—are no longer eligible for support?

Elizabeth Truss: I will take up the hon. Lady’s point with the Department for Work and Pensions.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

[910639] **Sir Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 13 January.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I am sure Members of the House will want to join me in offering our condolences to the family and friends of our former colleague Brian Binley, who died over Christmas, and who was an irrepressible Member of this House.

Today, we are publishing our proposals for reforming the Mental Health Act. For too long we have seen rising rates of detention that not only had little beneficial effect, but left some worse off, not better off. That is why we are making sure the Act works better for some of the most vulnerable in our society and gives them more of a legal right in deciding what treatment works best for them. My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will update the House shortly.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Sir Gary Streeter [V]: I know the whole House will want to associate itself with the Prime Minister’s remarks about our dear Brian Binley.

One of the groups hit hardest by the pandemic is young people in full-time education, especially those facing exams last year and this, with all of the mental health challenges that come from such uncertainty. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those for whom exams have been scrapped this year would now benefit from the utmost clarity about how exactly they will be assessed? A clear plan announced early, without last-minute changes, would help teachers and students prepare for an even more challenging experience.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is clearly a problem of differential learning that has grown over the last few months and risks being exacerbated now by the current lockdown. We will do everything we can to ensure that exams are fair and that the ways of testing are set out in a timely way, and the Department for Education is launching a consultation with Ofqual to ensure that we get the right arrangements for this year.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Can I join in the condolences expressed by the Prime Minister, I am sure on behalf of the whole of the House?

Could I begin by paying tribute to all those involved in the vaccine programme? I went to the Newham vaccine hub last week, and it was really uplifting to see the NHS, the Red Cross and lots of volunteers all working together and giving real hope. They had a simple message for me, which was if they had more vaccine, they could and they would do more, and I am sure that is shared across the country.

I welcome news that has come out this morning about a pilot of 24/7 vaccine centres. I anticipate there is going to be huge clamour for this, so can the Prime Minister tell us: when will the 24/7 vaccine centres be open to the public, because I understand they are not at the moment, and when will they be rolled out across the country?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for what he says about the roll-out of vaccines. I can tell him that we will be going to 24/7 as soon as we can, and my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will be setting out more about that in due course. As he rightly says, at the moment the limit is on supply. We have a huge network—233 hospitals, 1,000 GP surgeries, 200 pharmacies and 50 mass vaccination centres—and they are going, as he has seen himself, exceptionally fast, and I pay tribute to their work. It is thanks to the work of the NHS and to the vaccine taskforce that we have secured more doses, I think, per capita than virtually any other country in the world—certainly more than any other country in Europe.

Keir Starmer: I obviously welcome that, and urge the Prime Minister and the Government to get on with this. We are all happy to help, and there are many volunteers who are. The sooner we have 24/7 vaccine centres, the better for our NHS and the better for our economy.

The last PMQs was on 16 December. The Prime Minister told us then that we were seeing, in his words, “significant reductions in the virus.”—[*Official Report*, 16 December 2020; Vol. 686, c. 265.]

He told us then that there was no need for “endless lockdowns” and no need to change the rules about Christmas mixing. Since that last PMQs, 17,000 people

have died of covid, 60,000 people have been admitted to hospital, and there have been more than 1 million new cases. How did the Prime Minister get it so wrong, and why was he so slow to act?

The Prime Minister: Of course, what the right hon. and learned Gentleman fails to point out is that on 18 December, two days later, the Government were informed about the spread of the new variant, and the fact that it spreads roughly 50% to 70% faster than the old variant. That is why it is correct to say that the situation today is very troubling indeed: we have 32,000 covid patients in hospital, and the NHS is under huge strain.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the staff, doctors, nurses, and everybody else working in our NHS. They are doing an extraordinary job under the most challenging possible circumstances to help those who so desperately need it. I thank them for what they are doing. At the same time, I also wish to thank all those involved in what is the biggest vaccination programme in the history of this country. Once again, the NHS is in the lead, working with the Army and the legion of volunteers and everybody else. That programme of vaccines shows the way forward, and shows how we will come through this pandemic. I repeat my gratitude to all those involved, because they have now vaccinated 2.4 million people and delivered 2.8 million doses, which is more than any other country in Europe. This is the toughest of times, but we can see the way forward.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister says that effectively two days after that PMQs the advice changed, but the truth is that the indicators were all in the wrong direction at that last PMQs. Be that as it may, the Prime Minister says that he got that advice on 18 December, two days after PMQs, and we have all seen the SAGE minutes of 22 December, confirming the advice that was given to the Government. The Government's advisers warned the Prime Minister that the new variant was spreading fast, and that it was highly unlikely that November-style lockdowns would be sufficient to control it. That was pretty clear advice on 18 December to the Prime Minister from SAGE: a tougher lockdown than in November was going to be needed. I have the minutes here; everybody has seen them. Yet instead of acting on 18 December, the Prime Minister sat on his hands for over two weeks, and we are now seeing in the daily figures the tragic consequences of that delay. How does the Prime Minister justify delaying for 17 days after he got that advice on 18 December?

The Prime Minister: I must disagree very profoundly with what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has just said. He knows very well that within 24 hours of getting the advice on 18 December about the spread of the new variant, we acted to put the vast part of the country into much, much tougher measures. Indeed, we are now seeing—it is important to stress that these are early days—the beginnings of some signs that that is starting to have an effect in many parts of the country, but by no means everywhere. It is early days, and people must keep their discipline, keep enforcing the rules, and work together, as I have said, to roll out that vaccine programme. I recall that on the day that we went into a national lockdown and, sadly, were obliged to shut the schools—even on that day—the Labour party was advocating keeping schools open. That was for

understandable reasons—we all want to keep schools open—but I think it a bit much to be attacked for taking tougher measures to put this country into the protective measures it needed, when the Labour party was then calling to keep schools open.

Keir Starmer: Just for the record, I wrote to the Prime Minister on 22 December—I had not seen the SAGE advice at that stage—saying to him that if the advice indicated that there should be a national lockdown, he should do it immediately and he would have our full support. I will put that in the public domain so that people can check the record.

More fundamentally, the Prime Minister says, “We took measures straight away; we put people into different tiers.” The advice was that a November-style lockdown was not enough. How on earth was putting people into a different tier system an answer to the advice that was given? Is not the situation that every time there is a big decision to take, the Prime Minister gets there late?

The next big decision is obvious. The current restrictions are not strong enough to control the virus; stronger restrictions are needed. There is no point Government Members shaking their heads; in a week or two, the Prime Minister is likely to be asking Members to vote for this. Can the Prime Minister tell us, when infection rates are much higher than last March, when hospital admissions are much higher than last March, when death rates are much higher than last March, why on earth restrictions are weaker than last March?

The Prime Minister: We keep things under constant review and we will continue to do so, and certainly, if there is any need to toughen up restrictions, which I do not rule out, we will of course come to this House. But perhaps, as is so often the case, the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not listen to my earlier answer, because I pointed out to the House that actually, the lockdown measures that we have in place, combined with the tier 4 measures that we were using, are starting to show signs of having some effect. We must take account of that too, because nobody can doubt the serious damage that is done by lockdowns to people's mental health, jobs and livelihoods.

To listen to the right hon. and learned Gentleman over the last 12 months, you would think he had absolutely no other policy except to plunge this country into 12 months of lockdown. As for coming too late to things, it was only a few weeks ago that he was attacking the vaccine taskforce, which has secured the very doses—the millions of doses—that have put this country into the comparatively favourable position that we now find ourselves in.

Keir Starmer: That is just not true. Every time I have spoken about the vaccine, I have supported it. The Prime Minister says we are balancing health restrictions and the economy, yet we ended 2020 with the highest death toll in Europe and the deepest recession in any major economy, so that is just not a good enough answer.

I want to turn to the latest free school meals scandal. We have all seen images on social media of disgraceful food parcels for children, costed at about £5 each. That is not what the Government promised. It is nowhere

near enough. Would the Prime Minister be happy with his kids living on that? If not, why is he happy for other people's kids to do so?

The Prime Minister: I do not think anybody in this House is happy with the disgraceful images that we have seen of the food parcels that have been offered. They are appalling; they are an insult to the families who have received them. I am grateful, by the way, to Marcus Rashford, who highlighted the issue and is doing quite an effective job, by comparison with the right hon. and learned Gentleman, of holding the Government to account for these issues. The company in question has rightly apologised and agreed to reimburse.

It is because we want to see our kids properly fed throughout this very difficult pandemic that we have massively increased the value of what we are providing—another £170 million in the covid winter grant scheme, £220 million more for the holiday activities and food programme, and we are now rolling out the national free school meal voucher scheme, as we did in March, to give parents the choice to give kids the food that they need. This Government will do everything we can to ensure that no child goes hungry as a result of the privations caused by this pandemic.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister says that the parcels are “disgraceful”, but it should not have taken social media to shame the Prime Minister into action. Like the Education Secretary, he blames others, and he invites me to hold him to account, so let me do that because blaming others, Prime Minister, is not as simple as that, is it?

I have checked the Government guidance on free school meals—the current guidance, published by the Department for Education. I have it here. It sets out an

“Example parcel for one child for five days”—

the Department for Education, Prime Minister; you want to be held to account—

“1 loaf of bread...2 baking potatoes...block of cheese...baked beans...3 individual”

yoghurts. Sound familiar? They are the images, Prime Minister, you just called “disgraceful”.

The only difference I can see with this list and what the Prime Minister has described as “disgraceful” is a tin of sweetcorn, a packet of ham and a bottle of milk. He blames others, but this is on his watch. The truth is, families come last under this Government, whether it is exams, free school meals or childcare. Will the Prime Minister undertake—he wants to be held to account—to take down this guidance by the close of play today and ensure that all our children can get a decent meal during the pandemic?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's words would be less hypocritical and absurd if it were not for the fact that the—

Mr Speaker: I do not believe anybody is a hypocrite in this Chamber. I think we need to be a little bit careful about what we are saying to each other. There was a “not true” earlier and there were also comparisons to others. Please, let us keep discipline in this Chamber and respect for each other. We are tidying up how this Parliament behaves and I certainly expect the leadership of both parties to ensure that that takes place. Prime Minister, would you like to withdraw the word “hypocrisy”?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to be advised by you, Mr Speaker. Let me confine my criticism to the absurdity—which I hope is acceptable, Mr Speaker—of the right hon. and learned Gentleman attacking us over free school meals when it was a Conservative Government who instituted free school meals—universally approved—not a Labour Government. Of the £280 billion that we have spent securing the jobs and livelihoods of people across this country, uprating universal credit and, in addition, increasing the living wage by record amounts this year and last year, as well as increasing the local housing allowance, the overwhelming majority of benefits—the bulk of the measures—fall in favour of the poorest and the neediest in society, which is what this House would expect.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman takes one position one week and one position the next. That is what he does. That has been his whole lamentable approach—if I can get away with lamentable, Mr Speaker—throughout this pandemic. He says he supports the vaccine now. He says he supports the vaccine roll-out, and he tries to associate himself with it because he senses that it is going well, but be in no doubt, that that was the party that wanted us—this country—to stay in the European Union vaccine programme. That is absolutely true. He stood on a manifesto, which he has not repudiated, to dismantle the very pharmaceutical companies that have created this miracle of science, which is true—

Mr Speaker: Prime Minister, there are questions and sometimes we have got to try to answer the question that was asked of you. To run through the history is one thing, but in fairness, it is Prime Minister's questions. That was the final question from the Leader of the Opposition. We have lots of others to go through, so I think I am now going to move on to Simon Jupp in Sidmouth, who is desperate to ask a question of you, Prime Minister.

[910641] **Simon Jupp** (East Devon) (Con) [V]: The hospitality industry is the lifeblood of East Devon. Our pubs, restaurants, cafés and hotels provide thousands of jobs, places to meet and places to stay. The generous support package now put in place will tide many of these businesses over for now, but they will need further support. Will my right hon. Friend consider extending the VAT cut for hospitality to give them a helping hand when they are back open for business?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has done everything he can to help businesses throughout this pandemic, and that is why he has extended the grants and why we have the cuts for both VAT and business rates. We will do everything we can to help as we go forward, but the best thing would of course be to ensure that we roll out this vaccine programme and bounce back as fast as possible. Any further announcements my right hon. Friend makes will be well ahead of 31 March, by which time we intend to have a Budget.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) [V]: My constituent in Lochaber, a producer and exporter of shellfish, is experiencing his worst nightmare. After loading a lorry of fresh local seafood on Monday, as he has done for 35 years, his driver faced bureaucracy and delays. Brexit red tape meant that £40,000-worth of his

fresh, high-quality produce was lost, unable to be sold. That £40,000 of produce is income for more than 100 local families in many remote and fragile communities. Will the Prime Minister tell my constituent where the sea of opportunity is that he and his Scottish Tories promised?

The Prime Minister: We are putting £100 million into supporting the fishing industry in Scotland and across the whole of the UK. It is the policy of the Scottish nationalist party not only to break up the United Kingdom under its hare-brained scheme but to take Scotland back into the EU and hand back control of Scottish fisheries to Brussels, thereby throwing away all those opportunities in a way that I think even the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) would say is totally absurd. I am amazed that the right hon. Gentleman continues on this track.

Ian Blackford: I am amazed that the Prime Minister continues to traduce the name of the Scottish National party. He has been told before, and he really should get it right.

Frankly, that answer was an insult to all the fishermen today facing loss. The reality is that a third of the Scottish fishing fleet is tied up in harbour; some boats are landing in Denmark, rather than Scotland, to avoid Brexit bureaucracy; and Scottish seafood exporters are losing upwards of £1 million in sales a day. Seafood Scotland says all the extra red tape is an almost impossible task—it has even forced ferry operators to pause load deliveries to the continent. The European Union has put in place a €5 billion fund to support businesses with the costs of Brexit. Last night, it was revealed that Ireland will receive €1 billion of that. Will the Prime Minister tell Scottish businesses when they will get the same level of support? Where is the compensation for my constituent who is losing £40,000 today?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman continually advocates the break-up of the Union of the United Kingdom and going back into the European Union, even though that would be immensely destructive to the Scottish economy—to jobs, livelihoods, pensions and the currency. So far as I understand it, the Scottish nationalists are already spending money in Scotland on what they call indyref2 when they should be getting on with fighting the pandemic. That, I think, is what the people of Scotland want to see. He might pay tribute, by the way, to the merits of the United Kingdom in rolling out a vaccine across the whole country. I am told that they cannot even bring themselves to call it the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. Perhaps he could just say that he likes the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

Mr Speaker: Let us move to Yorkshire instead, with Julian Sturdy.

[910643] **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con)[V]: With the vaccination programme making very encouraging progress, can the Prime Minister reaffirm that lifting restrictions and returning to normal as soon as it is safe is an overriding national priority? May I invite him to consider drawing a line in the sand, in terms of the vaccination of sufficient numbers of the priority group, the reaching of which will trigger a phased relaxation of controls as immunity widens?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that we are going to go down the top four priority groups, who sadly count for 80% of covid deaths. The target, as he knows, is that by 15 February there will then be an opportunity to look carefully at the measures we have in place. We will try to reverse the restrictions as soon as we reasonably can, in a way that does not involve overwhelming the NHS.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP) [V]: The Prime Minister promised us that Northern Ireland would continue to have unfettered access to the UK internal market, yet consumers in my constituency are facing empty supermarket shelves and cannot get parcels delivered from Great Britain, small businesses cannot bring spare parts and raw materials into Northern Ireland from Great Britain, steel importers are facing tariffs and we have many other problems, all caused by the Northern Ireland protocol. What I and the people of Northern Ireland need to know from the Prime Minister, as leader of the United Kingdom, is what his Government are going to do to address this, and whether he will consider invoking article 16 of the Northern Ireland protocol to resolve these issues. The trader support service is welcome, but it alone is not the solution. We need direct Government intervention to deal with this now.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, and I can tell him that, at the moment, goods are flowing effectively and in normal volumes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. So far, no lorries have been turned back. Yes, of course there are teething problems, but I can confirm that if there are problems that we believe are disproportionate, we will have no hesitation in invoking article 16.

[910645] **Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his trade deal with the EU and welcome the prospect of a more global approach to our trading policy. Would he agree that a freeport based at East Midlands airport, connected to the world by trains, planes and automobiles and focused on generating green growth, is key to the success of global Britain?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted that my hon. Friend is campaigning for a freeport. I am a passionate supporter of freeports. There will be a process, as she knows, and successful applicants will be announced in the spring.

[910640] **Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD) [V]: I hope that the Prime Minister will join me in congratulating the local GPs and all the admin, medical and volunteer staff who have set up the Batchwood Hall vaccination centre in St Albans at incredible speed. They have already vaccinated thousands of residents, but their enormous local success is being hampered because they are being provided with only enough vaccine supplies to vaccinate 1,100 people a day on just two days a week, and they are often getting the vaccine deliveries at very short notice. Will the Prime Minister personally intervene to ensure that Batchwood Hall vaccination centre in St Albans and all primary care network-led local vaccine services have a much greater and more consistent vaccine supply, so that they can get on with the job of vaccinating the country against covid?

The Prime Minister: I certainly thank the GP vaccination centre in St Albans for what it is doing and for its wonderful work. It is thanks to primary care networks across the country that we have done 2.8 million vaccines for 2.4 million people. The constraint is not the distribution network; it is the supply, but don't forget that we have a bigger supply than all other European countries—indeed, we have virtually done as many vaccines as all the other European countries put together—and we will be ramping up that supply in the days and weeks ahead.

[910647] **Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in thanking Shropshire's defence engineers, in both the public and private sectors, who are currently working on the Warrior and Boxer military vehicle programmes and doing a great job? As the Government consider making a decision on the Challenger 2 life extension programme, will he bear in mind that excellent workforce in Shropshire, who have such a history, and a modern-day practice, of delivering UK defence?

The Prime Minister: Of course I am familiar with the superb workforce in Shropshire to which my hon. Friend refers. There is a competition currently going on, and negotiations are going on with the modernisation that he speaks of. As he knows, we have made the biggest investment in our defences since the cold war with the recent spending review, but it would not be right for me to comment on those negotiations at this stage.

[910642] **Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab) [V]: Widening inequalities are tearing communities apart, and covid has made things much worse. In Hornsey and Wood Green we have a 182% increase in joblessness. Today, will the Prime Minister pledge to reverse the planned £1,000 per annum cut to universal credit, to provide a certain future for the increasing numbers of people who use universal credit as a lifeline?

The Prime Minister: Not only have we uprated universal credit by £1,000, but, as I have said, we have increased the local housing allowance, the living wage and many, many other benefits. We will keep all this under constant review. I know that the hon. Lady speaks for the Labour Front Bench. Current Labour policy, as far as I understand it, is to abolish UC. Many people in receipt of UC, knowing how important it is, will find that stunning, in view of what she has just said.

[910648] **Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con) [V]: Here in East Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire and the Humber, we have some of the highest flood risk in the country, and we are still waiting for the report on the flooding of the River Aire at East Cowick and Snaith, just up the road from me here, which took place 10 months ago. I welcome the doubling of flood defence funding, which is most welcome in an area such as mine, but we often come up against the challenges of bureaucracy and sometimes Treasury funding rules. So may I ask the Prime Minister to look at what more can be done to reduce the red tape involved in bringing schemes forward? Although I appreciate the need for national agencies, will he also look at what we can do to utilise local flood authorities or drainage boards by providing them with direct cash, as well as the Environment Agency, to bring forward projects that will protect homes and people?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about the need to improve flood defences, which is why we are investing £2.6 billion in 1,000 flood defences in England in the next six years. The Humber estuary, the area he represents so well, is one of four areas that will benefit from trials of long-term ways of making all our country more resistant to flooding.

[910644] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab) [V]: There is real disappointment that a reciprocal work permit-free deal for touring musicians and performers has not been agreed with the EU. No one is interested in a blame game. It is clearly fixable and in Britain's economic and cultural interest to fix it quickly, but it needs leadership from the top. So will the Prime Minister meet on this virtually with a small group of MPs, including the Conservative Chair of the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport? We are all singing from the same song sheet. Will the Prime Minister please say yes to the meeting?

The Prime Minister: I will, of course, ensure that there is a proper meeting with the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on this subject, which is extremely important. I know that our friends in the EU will be wanting to go further to improve things not just for musicians, but for business travellers of all kinds, because there is a mutual benefit.

[910649] **Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con): For the first time in my lifetime, we are now a fully sovereign and independent nation, so I would like to thank the Prime Minister, on behalf of the people of Redcar and Cleveland, for getting Brexit done. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) pointed out, one key benefit of Brexit is our ability to create 10 new freeports. In Teesside, we have the largest brownfield development site in Europe, the deepest port on the east coast, a fantastic Tees Valley Mayor in Ben Houchen and a plan to create 15,000 jobs over the next 20 years. So does the Prime Minister agree that the best place for our first post-Brexit freeport is Teesside?

The Prime Minister: There has been a bit of a theme to the interventions from my brilliant freeport campaigners behind me. They are absolutely right. We do not hear about it from the Labour party, but Mr Hydrogen, as I think my hon. Friend is now known, makes an excellent point. As I said earlier, the bidding process is under way and it would be wrong of me to comment any further.

[910646] **Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab) [V]: I join my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition in paying tribute to those involved in the vaccine roll-out. However, the *Yorkshire Post* highlighted this week that many of the country's 11,000 community pharmacies stand ready, willing and able to deliver desperately needed covid vaccines, yet the Prime Minister's Government have seemingly shunned an army of fully trained, experienced and registered technicians. Pharmacies such as Witham pharmacy in east Hull are at the forefront of the flu vaccine every single winter and are ready to play their part in the national effort, so will the Prime Minister now take control, fully mobilise the skills and expertise of community pharmacies and get Britain vaccinated?

The Prime Minister: There are 9,000 fantastic community pharmacies across our country. They do an amazing job. What we want to ensure is that we get doses to the

places where they are going to be distributed most effectively the fastest. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would not want to see doses distributed to many places where they might not all be used in the course of the day. We need at this stage to avoid any wastage at all. That is why we are concentrating on the 233 hospitals, 50 mass vaccination sites and 200 pharmacies already, and we will wrap that up. It will be particularly important as we come into the phases when we need to reach people who are harder to reach in local communities, and there, local pharmacies will, as he rightly says, play a vital role.

[910652] **Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): I am sure the Prime Minister will join me in saying that we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all our carers, including unpaid carers, young carers and those throughout the social care profession, for the tireless work they have done during the pandemic. Representing North Norfolk, the constituency with the oldest demographic, I have seen their work at first hand. Yet these professionals often feel forgotten about, and that needs to change. Will he commit to a 10-year plan for social care to match the one for the NHS as the foundation to start reforming social care in this country?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the extraordinary work done by carers and social care workers up and down the country. They have got through this pandemic. We must continue to look after them in any way that we can and we must commit, as we have done, to reforming the sector and giving people the certainty they need. We will be bringing forward proposals later this year.

[910650] **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) [V]: On Monday, thousands of British Gas workers finished striking in protest at the threat of being fired and rehired on reduced terms and conditions. Of course, it was British Airways's shameful fire and rehire actions that prompted the Prime Minister to say that he was looking at what he could do. He has also called for employers to display "fairness and respect", but clearly that has not happened and is not happening, and he must now step up. I have a Bill with cross-party support that would outlaw the practice, so will he meet me to discuss how we can provide more protection for all our workers?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman says, we believe that using threats of firing and rehiring is unacceptable as a negotiating tactic, and there are laws in place to ensure that contractual conditions cannot discriminate against people on grounds of race, sex or disability, but I will take up his point by saying that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is working with ACAS, businesses and employee representatives to discuss what more we can do.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): Jay Fathers died in hospital having been stabbed in the early hours of new year's day. Last week, the killers of Dom Ansa and Ben Gillham-Rice were sentenced to life imprisonment. Knife crime is destroying lives in Milton Keynes, across the Thames valley and across the UK, even during a pandemic. Can my right hon. Friend outline what support the Government are giving to provide police forces with the tools they need to make our streets safer?

The Prime Minister: First, we are introducing knife crime prevention orders, which are placing curbs and limits to deter young people from going equipped and getting involved in knife crime. We have made sure that we deliver on the serious violence strategy, engaging with young people and steering them away from knife crime, but what it takes is continuous and serious law enforcement, making sure that people who carry a knife do get the sentences they deserve. That is why we are also putting more police out on the streets of our country and have recruited almost 6,000 of the additional 20,000 that we committed to at the last election.

[910651] **Anna McMorris** (Cardiff North) (Lab) [V]: Workers in Cardiff North and across the country are facing continued job insecurity and, as we heard, shameful fire and rehire tactics, which are forcing British Gas workers to take a stand against them and strike in the most difficult of circumstances. The director of British Gas responded by boasting that covid has kept this strike out of the news. Will the Prime Minister condemn those remarks and protect the livelihoods of thousands of workers and their families by finally outlawing fire and rehire?

The Prime Minister: In so far as that was the gentleman's intention, he has failed in that. Possibly the best thing I can do is repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), who has already raised the subject of the strike. We regard fire and rehire as unacceptable, and we will continue to make that point and seek further means of redress.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con) [V]: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the opportunity to chair an early years healthy development review on behalf of the Government. He knows only too well how awful the lockdown has been for new parents and their families, in addition to the existing pressures under which new parents find themselves. Can he assure me that the recommendations of this important review will form a core part of his ambition to build back better and make sure that every baby gets the best start in life?

The Prime Minister: For many years now I have been listening to my right hon. Friend making her points with the passion and knowledge that she does, and I know she is right. I look forward very much to her review, and to her submitting her findings, and I look forward to working together with her to achieve the change that we want for early years children.

[910653] **Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab) [V]: This week, I got an email from Elena Hough, the deputy head of Wendell Park Primary School in my constituency. She says that lack of Government guidance means that her staff will soon be teaching over 100 children in school—10 times the number in the first lockdown. Having a lockdown in name only may suit the Prime Minister. He can feign tackling the virus while tipping the wink to his anti-lockdown Back Benchers and bending the rules himself, but as Miss Hough says, her pupils and staff, who, like those in all Hammersmith schools, are doing a fantastic job under the most difficult of circumstances, deserve better. Why are they being hung out to dry by the Prime Minister and his Education Secretary?

The Prime Minister: I thank very much all the schools in Hammersmith, and indeed throughout London and throughout the country, which are working so hard to look after vulnerable kids and to look after children of key workers. At the moment the percentage in school is about 14%, which is, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, higher than it was in March. I think the gist of his question was that schools should be closed altogether. I do not think that is right. I think what the country wants to see is the children of key workers and vulnerable

kids getting the education that they need. I thank very much the teachers and all the staff involved for making that possible.

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

12.43 pm

Sitting suspended.

Northern Ireland Protocol: Disruption to Trade

12.46 pm

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the disruption to trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland as a result of the Northern Ireland protocol.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): I am grateful for the chance to update the House on the operation of the Northern Ireland protocol. The protocol exists to recognise Northern Ireland's unique position as the only part of our United Kingdom to have a land border with the EU. It was designed to ensure that no customs infrastructure is needed between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, while protecting unfettered access for Northern Ireland's businesses to the rest of the UK market and the gains of the peace process and, of course, respecting Northern Ireland's position as an absolutely integral part of the United Kingdom.

As with any new trading arrangement, the protocol undoubtedly generates challenges as well as providing solutions. The Government are committed to addressing those challenges by providing pragmatic solutions to any problems that arise and working with the Northern Ireland Executive in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland. UK Government Ministers are in daily contact with Ministers in the Executive, and with businesses in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, to ensure the effective operation of the protocol.

Inevitably, the impact of covid and the steps taken by the French Government at their border have affected retail businesses across the United Kingdom, but it is important to stress that freight volumes going into Northern Ireland's ports are at normal levels for this time of year. There have been no significant queues, and supermarkets are now generally reporting healthy deliveries of supplies into Northern Ireland.

None the less, the new processes that the protocol asks of businesses that are moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland require the Government to do more. We are working with companies across Great Britain to help them understand the new requirements for moving goods, and the extensive Government support includes the trader support service, to which more than 25,000 businesses are now signed up, yet we know that still more needs to be done.

That is why we are stepping up direct engagement with suppliers to ensure they have access to the realtime guidance they need, and we are also working closely with industry to address specific problems of moving mixed food loads from Great Britain to Northern Ireland through the process known as groupage. In the coming days, the Government will issue new guidance on the practical mitigations that have been developed with industry to enable this important practice to continue and to support hauliers and suppliers.

We also recognise that a number of hauliers have been affected by significant issues at Dublin port. We welcome the easements that have been introduced by the Irish Government, but movements via Dublin are substantially lower than normal, so we have to intensify our engagement with the Irish authorities.

More broadly, the grace periods for supermarkets and their suppliers are now working well, but we are already planning for the streamlined replacements that will follow. A dedicated team within DEFRA, working with the Cabinet Office, is also in touch with the industry to promote readiness, supported by new specific Government funding.

Ultimately, the future of the protocol is in the hands of Northern Ireland's people, and its renewal is a question of democratic consent. The responsibility of this Government is to ensure that it operates in an effective, legal and pragmatic way, and that is the spirit in which we approach its implementation.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson [V]: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to put this urgent question.

I thank the Minister for his response. He has sought to address a number of the issues that I wish to raise. I have to say to him, however, that the difficulties encountered by Northern Ireland consumers and businesses may be greater than he recognises. I am still being contacted by constituents who are finding it difficult to order online items from Great Britain. There are many parcel companies and others that will not deliver to Northern Ireland and will not even accept orders from Northern Ireland as a result of the Northern Ireland protocol.

Businesses in Northern Ireland are also having difficulty ordering spare parts for equipment and importing raw materials. Just this week, our steel manufacturers in Northern Ireland have been informed that they face a 25% tariff on some steel imports as a direct result of the Northern Ireland protocol, because we cannot align with the UK quota on that.

Consumers continue to face difficulties in supermarkets. It is not the case that all supermarket shelves are fully stocked. Yesterday, we met some of the main supply chain people in Northern Ireland, who talk of ongoing difficulties in bringing goods in from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. Those issues need to be resolved.

The Minister referred to haulage and specifically to groupage. I welcome his commitment to find a practical solution to that with DEFRA. We need to continue to work on that, because we have seen at least 40% of hauliers returning to Northern Ireland with empty trailers because of the Northern Ireland protocol and its impact. Although the trader support scheme is welcome, more needs to be done to inform and assist businesses in Great Britain about the operation of the protocol and how they can continue to send goods into Northern Ireland, because our experience is that that is clearly not well understood.

What do we need the Government to do? We need immediate intervention on this matter. It is important for our economy. This is having an impact on the economy of Northern Ireland and, in some instances, it is resulting in a diversion of trade, so we need steps to be taken to address what is becoming a cliff edge at the end of March for our supermarkets and others. I welcome what the Minister has said about the ongoing discussions, but we need an assurance that this will be resolved before the end of March or that the grace period will be extended further. We also need to ensure that hauliers get the support they need and that we find practical solutions to the whole question of groupage. Above all else—

Mr Speaker: Order. I think Minister Gove needs to be able to answer the question.

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising those issues. Members of Parliament from across Northern Ireland, representing all parties, and indeed Members of the Assembly and Northern Ireland businesses, have been in touch directly with me and others to provide detailed information about the challenges that individual companies face. We are grateful for that, because we want to do everything that we can to resolve those problems.

On the specific questions that the right hon. Gentleman raises, there have been some online sales organisations that temporarily paused the distribution of goods to Northern Ireland, but the majority of parcel distributors continue to distribute goods. We are working with those who have paused—a small number, admittedly—to ensure that they resume normal service. It is important to recognise, as he pointed out, that although Northern Ireland's businesses have been well prepared for the protocol, there are businesses sited in Great Britain, which operate in Northern Ireland, that we need to work more closely with to acquaint them with the guidance to provide the necessary reassurance.

The right hon. Gentleman made a point about steel tariffs; those tariffs would provisionally apply only to steel from the rest of the world, not to steel from Britain or the EU entering Northern Ireland, but we are looking at ways in which we can provide, through either the quotas or appropriate rebates, an automatic guarantee that businesses will not pay those tariffs for the steel that they need.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the concern that customers have had about the shortage of specific goods in supermarkets. There was initial disruption, but I am pleased to say that Andrew Opie of the British Retail Consortium confirmed earlier today to the Future Relationship with the European Union Committee that those shortages have now been overcome, pretty much. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, though, that we need to make sure that we have a sustainable approach for the end of the grace period at the end of March, and I will be working with Helen Dickinson of the BRC, and others, to do just that.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned some of the difficulties that businesses have had with the trader support service; 95% of queries have been answered within 15 minutes, but we still must do better in order to ensure that every business gets the support that it needs. I have been in touch with the Road Haulage Association and Logistics UK to deal with some of the specific problems that hauliers face, and we are contemplating what more might be required to support them.

On one final point, I know that the right hon. Gentleman and a number of other Members have been deeply concerned about the operation of additional VAT costs on second-hand vehicles being sold in Northern Ireland. I can confirm today that Her Majesty's Treasury and HMRC will reinstate a margin scheme in order to ensure that Northern Ireland customers need pay no more than those in any other part of the United Kingdom.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) [V]: Will my right hon. Friend introduce urgent legislation to ensure the smooth flow of goods between Northern Ireland and

GB? Is it not crucial to our Union, in respect of both Northern Ireland and Scotland, that the Government keep their promise to take control of our laws and borders and to demonstrate a more prosperous internal market for the whole UK?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want, first of all, to make sure that we are doing everything technically and administratively to ensure the smooth flow of goods necessary, but, as the Prime Minister confirmed to the House earlier, if we need to take further legal steps, then of course we will.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab) [V]: The disruption to trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland is serious and it is unacceptable. We have seen the empty supermarket shelves, the lorries from Northern Ireland that have been stuck in Britain or are returning empty, and the unnecessary checks on everything from guide dogs to people moving house. These problems were foreseen time and again in this House and elsewhere and they are, I am afraid to say, the inevitable consequence of the Government's shambolic preparations for the protocol and the last-minute guidance given to business.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has acknowledged that British business was not prepared for the changes to the trading relationship—and little wonder, when the main Brexit advert running in Britain does not mention Northern Ireland at all, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland sends tweets denying that there is a border of any description, and the Prime Minister just claimed that there was no disruption whatsoever. This denialism is incredibly frustrating to those dealing with the consequences of this Government's actions.

Although the protocol is far from perfect, it must be made to work, so I would be grateful if the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster could set out what explicit steps he is taking to support British businesses, and how many British-based businesses have accessed the trader support service. Will he set out the plan for the Joint Committee to resolve the many outstanding issues, and how he will avoid the cliff edges to the grace periods in April and July? Will he confirm whether any easements have been sought with his counterparts on sanitary and phytosanitary or customs checks?

Of utmost importance to us today is that the protocol explicitly commits all parties to ensure that it impacts as little as possible on the everyday life of communities in Northern Ireland. As it stands, those communities are currently facing shortages and price rises, which will only get worse unless the Government are honest about the challenges that we face, engage with business and take the urgent action that is required.

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for all the points that she raises; they are all legitimate. It is important, of course, to recognise that some of the problems that were identified in the very first few days of the operation of the protocol have been addressed. As I mentioned, Andrew Opie of the British Retail Consortium explained to the FREU Committee earlier today that the supply of goods to supermarket shelves is now pretty much as normal. It is also important to recall that, as the Prime Minister stated earlier, no trucks have been turned away and that we now have

[Michael Gove]

normal traffic for this time of year. But the hon. Lady is right to say that there are and will remain challenges that it is the Government's responsibility to address.

The hon. Lady asked specifically about engagement with the trader support service. As I mentioned earlier, more than 25,000 businesses have engaged with the TSS, but there is more that the Government must do to ensure that all businesses are acquainted with the new procedures that the protocol requires and that our departure from the European Union requires when it comes to trade across the short straits.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right: the protocol should impact as little as possible on the lives of the citizens of Northern Ireland. That is why I will be working not just with businesses and representatives in Northern Ireland, but through the Joint Committee to ensure that we have a pragmatic approach towards grace periods and the operation of the protocol, because we want to make sure that the citizens of Northern Ireland, who are integrally part of the United Kingdom, are valued in the same way as her own constituents and mine are by everyone in this House.

Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con) [V]: I welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks. I particularly welcome the confidence that he is planning to give to UK businesses to continue to trade in Northern Ireland—a fantastic base for their products and services. Will he confirm that the protocol is a joint UK-EU responsibility and, in that light, will he look at setting up immediately the joint working group, beneath the Joint Committee, and also use his negotiating talents and the relationships that he built up last year in completing the protocol to make 2021 a grace period for supermarkets in Northern Ireland? I think the EU will be up for that deal, so let us make it happen.

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. No one has better negotiating skills than him. We remember that it is almost a year to the day since the "New Decade, New Approach" agreement was concluded, which restored democratic government to Northern Ireland. That was secured thanks to his leadership as a superb Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that the protocol is a joint responsibility and I will be talking to my colleagues in the Commission as well as to representatives of the Government in Dublin to ensure that we do everything possible to smooth life for citizens of Northern Ireland. He is absolutely right: it is a wonderful place in which to live and to do business, and in this year of all years we must do everything possible to support the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) [V]: Having lectured businesses for months about being prepared, it seems that the UK Government themselves have failed to prepare for this hard Brexit. When the Minister promised Northern Ireland the best of both worlds in trade, I wonder whether he envisaged lorries trapped in red tape at a border that he and the Secretary of State have claimed does not exist.

Does the Minister accept that businesses are facing greater uncertainty and greater administrative burdens than promised? Will he explain what is being done to

help Northern Ireland hauliers and facilitate groupage? Can he explain why Scottish Government warnings over the need for greater flexibility on grace periods are being ignored? That is particularly vexing considering the democratic outrage at the disregarding throughout of Scotland's position.

Does the Minister acknowledge the difficulties being caused for businesses, consumers and communities in Northern Ireland, along with the grave damage being done to the Scottish seafood and food and drink industries among others, and what will he do to resolve these issues? Finally, will he commit the UK Government to working with all the devolved Administrations to address the damage being done to businesses across the UK?

Michael Gove: I thank the hon. Lady for her points. It is important to stress that no lorries have been trapped in red tape. Lorries have been able to get into Northern Ireland without let or hindrance, which is why, as I mentioned earlier, Andrew Opie pointed out that supplies on supermarket shelves are as they should be. However, she is right to raise the question of groupage. It is a specific issue that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Cabinet Office are seeking to resolve when there are mixed loads from a number of different locations, all of which require appropriate SPS—Sanitary and Phyto Sanitary—certification. We will be coming forward with proposals to address that specific problem in due course.

The hon. Lady is right to raise the specific issue of seafood supplies. Owing to their perishable nature, it is absolutely vital that we ensure the smoothest possible access to European and other markets. I am very grateful for the constructive approach that has been taken by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) who, unlike those in the SNP, has come forward with some specific pragmatic solutions to this issue.

The final thing I would say is that, although many of the hon. Lady's points are legitimate, as I mentioned, I cannot help reflecting that there is a certain irony in the Scottish National party complaining about barriers to trade within the United Kingdom when its signature policy, which it is pursuing even at this time of covid, is to erect new trade barriers within the United Kingdom and, indeed, to impoverish Scotland's people. I know that that is not what she wants, but it would be the effect of her policies.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Is this chiefly an issue of valid applicability of the protocol, or of over-zealous—and perhaps erroneous—interpretation? If it is the former, when will my right hon. Friend take steps to address it with our European counterparts? If it is the latter, what will the Government do to better explain what hauliers and others in the industry can do to follow the rules and get it right?

Michael Gove: The truth is that it is a combination of factors. The first and most important thing is to make sure that all businesses, particularly businesses in Great Britain that trade and do business in Northern Ireland, understand what is required of them. That responsibility rests on my shoulders and on the Government's; that is the first and the single most important item. The second thing, as my hon. Friend quite rightly points out, is not so much that there is an over-zealous application—for

example, by the Northern Ireland Executive—but that there is, in the way in which some of the rules apply, a rigidity, which we need to address. That is why we are taking the action that we are—for example on VAT, on steel imports and on groupage.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab) [V]: The right hon. Gentleman has received a letter from the big supermarkets warning of the risk of further disruption to Northern Ireland food supplies from April, and this morning the Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union heard evidence from the British Retail Consortium that unless there are changes, the system will not be workable for supermarkets. Of course, he cannot guarantee that the current three-month grace period—in which, for example, export health certificates are not required—will be extended, because that is a matter for the Joint Committee. What will happen if it is not extended? What would that mean for choice and prices for consumers in Northern Ireland?

Michael Gove: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. As I mentioned earlier, I am grateful to his Select Committee for the exchanges with Andrew Opie, which provided reassurance about the operation of the protocol at the moment, but he is right to raise the letter that was sent to me by Helen Dickinson of the British Retail Consortium on behalf of a range of supermarkets. We are working intensively with those supermarkets and the Commission to address the problems. So far in my experience, Maroš Šefčovič, the Vice-President of the Commission, has always taken a pragmatic approach. As the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) reminded us, it is the responsibility of both the UK and the EU to ensure that the protocol impacts as little as possible on the lives of Northern Ireland citizens.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Given that almost 100% of the Republic's roll-on roll-off lorry traffic to the rest of the EU travels through GB, how many of these problems have actually been caused by the protocol, or have they instead been caused by the French closure of trade across the short straits and the problems that my right hon. Friend identified at Dublin port?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. There have been problems at Dublin port, and the Irish Government have responded to concerns and introduced easements. His first point is an even more important one. I do not want to shift any responsibility away from my own shoulders and those of my colleagues in dealing with specific protocol issues, but he is absolutely right; covid—and, in particular, the French Government's understandable but robust response to it—has affected trade overall. It is important that we put that into the picture in order to provide the necessary context.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]: I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I have lost count of the number of occasions on which he has stood at the Dispatch Box and given us all sorts of assurances that there would be no barriers to the free movement of goods between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. It gives me no pleasure to reflect that that is manifestly now not the case. We do at least, though, have a grace period to get things right,

and it is up to the right hon. Gentleman to ensure that that happens. Will he confirm whether the changes to groupage regulation to which he referred will also be effective for traders exporting from the rest of the United Kingdom to the European Union, especially seafood exporters? And while he is at it, why did we not have a grace period for exporters of perishable goods such as seafood? Surely that would have been sensible—with the benefit of hindsight, at least.

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his points. It is important to stress first that it is the case that there is unfettered access for goods going from Northern Ireland to Great Britain. The new processes that the protocol has created are about trade from Great Britain into Northern Ireland, and it is those specific challenges that we are addressing at the moment.

The right hon. Gentleman makes a point about groupage that is entirely right. Our response to the challenges faced by hauliers and traders must be one that works not just for access to Northern Ireland but for access to the rest of the EU. It applies particularly to those who are responsible for perishable goods, including the many outstanding companies in his constituency which, thanks to his kindness, I have had a chance to talk to about the challenges and opportunities of Brexit. On his final point about hindsight, let us wait and see for a wee while yet before we can all definitively say what has been successful and what has not.

Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con) [V]: I join my colleagues in thanking my right hon. Friend and his team for all the work they have done to secure a deal for the UK, which of course includes the residents and businesses of Northern Ireland. Many pressing operational considerations arise from that deal, but the withdrawal agreement was never intended as a final word. Indeed, an alternative arrangements commission reported favourably to Government in September 2019 on alternative deliverable measures. What progress are the Government making towards the delivery of alternative arrangements and any other complementary approaches, such as mutual enforcement?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Few people in this House are doing as much as he is doing at the moment to uphold the integrity of our United Kingdom. He is right that much work was done before the withdrawal agreement on different ways of resolving the challenges that we face on the island of Ireland, and some of those most intimately involved in that work, such as the distinguished trade expert Shanker Singham, are now involved in making sure that the trader support service delivers. He is also right that we will have to keep constantly under review, while respecting our legal obligations under the protocol, what more we can do to make sure that businesses in Northern Ireland can flourish and prosper.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP) [V]: People living in Northern Ireland—those living with the consequences of this protocol—will be amazed at the complacency that the Government have shown over the economic damage that has been done by the wrecking ball of the protocol. This week, the Chancellor indicated that he had seen no problems. The Prime Minister has said that there are no problems. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland says that there is no border in the

[Sammy Wilson]

Irish sea, but my constituents are bringing me hundreds of examples on a daily basis of goods that they are denied by suppliers and of additional costs. We see empty supermarket shelves, lorries are being delayed for long periods and people cannot even move their furniture from a house in England to Northern Ireland. Will the Minister explain why the Irish Government could take immediate action to set aside some of the requirements of the protocol and the EU requirements, yet our Government are still insisting that they have to obey the full legality of the protocol?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising these issues. I should stress that the Government are seeking to acknowledge that there are challenges but that some of those challenges are being overcome by good working by Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive and by businesses. As I mentioned earlier, some of the initial disruption in the first few days to supermarket supplies has now effectively been addressed, but there are a number of other issues that we are working through. I know that the right hon. Gentleman will, as other members of his party have been doing, be giving me granular information on precisely which businesses may have suffered from disruption, so that we can immediately act to support them and deal with any of the problems that they have identified. I look forward to carrying on that conversation.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con) [V]: I am afraid that this is an amplification of what the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) raised. The Minister is clearly aware of issues affecting GB to NI traffic, which I consider to be contrary to the guarantee of unfettered access in the Northern Ireland protocol, the Good Friday agreement and, indeed, the Act of Union. As he just heard, the Republic of Ireland is sensibly using a light-touch approach, but it seems that our HMRC is enforcing draconian customs measures on people simply trying to move home. Can he please ensure that HMRC does not gold-plate rules, that it acts sensibly and that the Joint Committee solves these issues forthwith?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I should say that colleagues in HMRC and other Government Departments have been working hard to meet the new requirements of the protocol, but I will be vigilant, and I know my colleagues will, for any unintentional inflexibility or gold-plating of any of these rules. That is why I am so grateful to him and others for bringing specific examples to my attention, because then we can act as an administrative Dyno-Rod in order to clear these blockages.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab) [V]: On 30 September, the Northern Ireland Secretary acknowledged to me in the House that there were going to be checks in Northern Ireland, but on 1 January he tweeted:

“There is no ‘Irish Sea Border’.”

Is not this default position of denial, denial, denial by Ministers hampering businesses in dealing with the reality of new checks and failing, failing, failing the people of Northern Ireland?

Michael Gove: No, no, no.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con) [V]: Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that we have to keep faith with the Northern Ireland protocol, which—long term—shows every sign of benefiting Northern Ireland in its commercial neighbourhood? Will he, however, signal early on to the Joint Committee our willingness to extend the grace period for food, noting the highly pragmatic easement that Dublin has applied? Long term, will he deal with the nonsense—the bureaucratic nonsense—of requiring highly qualified veterinary surgeons to do basic routine sanitary checks?

Michael Gove: Very good points. It is in the interests of the European Union to make the protocol work because, as I mentioned earlier, it is subject to democratic consent, and if it is not working then the people of Northern Ireland will reject it, but it is important. It is my responsibility, in the meantime, to do everything possible to make the lives of people in Northern Ireland easier, and my right hon. Friend's points about both easements and grace periods I entirely endorse.

Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP) [V]: The SDLP certainly did not wish for Brexit or its consequences, but in the interests of consumers and businesses we are working very hard to ensure that the protocol operates successfully. People here find it very difficult to listen to those Members who campaigned for Brexit and blocked every single alternative, and who explicitly said they do not care what the circumstances are so long as we are out of the EU.

Will the Minister take this opportunity to confirm that further disruption is not the answer and that he will not agree to the DUP's reckless calls to trigger article 16 and end the protocol? While people here find it very difficult to know what they can believe from the Government, will he commit to close working with the EU, business groups and, indeed, the dedicated Cabinet Office working group to ensure we do not face a further cliff edge at the start of April?

Michael Gove: I quite agree with the hon. Lady that we do need to work very closely to provide against the eventuality of the cliff edge she mentions. I should also say, however, that article 16 is part of the protocol, and it will be there should circumstances require it, as the Prime Minister pointed out earlier.

The other thing I would say is that I do not believe that any member of my party has been reckless in their position on maintaining the integrity of the United Kingdom. That is absolutely what we have sought to do throughout. The protocol is a means of doing that, but of course we must work to make sure that it operates effectively every day.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con) [V]: Can the Minister confirm that anyone wanting to take personal goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland will not be restricted in any way, and will he make sure that HMRC actually understands that that is an integral part of the Northern Ireland protocol?

Michael Gove: Absolutely—dead on.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) [V]: Article 16 is a simplistic answer, and it is currently not being sought by the Northern Ireland business community. There is no solution apart from the EU and the UK

working together to resolve problems. However, some of the issues also relate to the trade and co-operation agreement. It is a disappointment, for example, that the EU-New Zealand agreement on SPS checks was not replicated. Can the Minister confirm that this is something the UK Government will still continue to ask the EU to deploy, which would massively help movements across the Irish sea?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. Some of the specific aspects of the negotiation with the EU with regard to SPS matters meant that the EU was asking for dynamic alignment in specific areas, and that is not something that we can accept. However, more work can be done in order to smooth the passage of food into the European Union and vice versa.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Given that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said “No, no, no” a few moments ago, may I remind him that Margaret Thatcher once famously said that Northern Ireland was as British as Finchley? That must always remain the same. That being the case, can he reassure the House on three points?

First, if we find that the EU is responsible, perhaps even inadvertently, for some of these problems, will he raise those matters politely but firmly with Mr Šefčovič in the Joint Committee? Secondly, if, as some of my colleagues have suggested, some of these problems may be down to over-zealous interpretation by our own officials, will we stamp on that? Thirdly, as some firms in GB appear to be nervous about their legal position and are perhaps over-interpreting the situation, will the Government work very closely to consider easements to reassure them, as the excellent Shanker Singham has suggested, with my right hon. Friend’s very welcome announcement on cars being one good example?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right on those three things, which are absolutely at the heart of the approach that we are taking and that we have to take. We must make sure that there is no over-zealous interpretation on the ground; we must make sure that the European Union, along with the United Kingdom, lives up to its obligations to the people of Northern Ireland; and we must work with businesses in order to remove any misunderstandings and confusion that arise by affirming—as he did, quite rightly—the integral part of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab) [V]: If the Minister says that much of the problem is about businesses understanding what is expected of them, and that is a responsibility that falls squarely on his shoulders, then that does rather prompt the question of what he has been doing. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) suggested a working group. Why does he not bring one forward?

Michael Gove: We have.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Can I ask the Minister about the issues raised by a number of Members about grace periods? How will he assess whether he thinks things are in a good enough state for him to press for those grace periods to be extended, which a

number of Members have called for? It is fine for grace periods to expire if we are in good shape, but people will not understand if we are still having teething problems some way into this year.

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The way of doing so is by working with supermarkets and other major suppliers in order to make sure that they are ready. Of course we will make it clear to the European Commission what the consequences would be if supermarkets were not in a position to carry on with the service they provide to Northern Ireland consumers.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) [V]: Ferry traffic between Dublin and north Wales has diminished markedly as exporters apparently opt for alternative routes. Can the Minister tell me how many Northern Ireland exporters are now choosing direct ferry services from the Republic to the EU rather than using the UK landbridge? Is he aware of any Government assessment of the economic impact of this new routing on the port of Holyhead and on the wider economy of north-west Wales?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman is right. There is a new route from the Republic of Ireland to France, but there is no evidence yet that it has taken anything but a small fraction of the trade that goes through the landbridge. I will be talking to colleagues in the Welsh Government later this afternoon about everything we can do to make sure that Holyhead flourishes in the future.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement—for the seriousness with which he is taking this, but also for the context that he set out. Does he agree that the issues we are experiencing, while regrettable, were actually anticipated by the Government, and that a limited degree of disruption was always going to be the inevitable consequence of unwinding our membership of the European Union after over four decades and delivering on the clear mandate of the 2016 referendum?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have tried throughout to stress that there would be some initial disruption—some teething problems or bumps in the road—as we left the European Union. Many of the predictions that many people made about the consequences of leaving the European Union have not come to pass, and it is important to put that in context, although it is also important not to be in denial about any of these specific problems but to ensure that we smooth them away. So far we have been able to tackle these issues one by one, and we remain vigilant as we do so because we are making a success of our departure from the EU.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP) [V]: Brexit is not the problem; the problem is the implementation of the protocol. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster seems to be saying that there are fewer problems than we are experiencing on the ground. Will he indicate whether, in a socially distanced way, he will visit the ports in the next week or so, to see the problems at first hand? Will he then try to get a resolution, so that everyone can move forward with better security than they have had over the past few weeks?

Mr Speaker: We will make the best we can of that—it was difficult to hear.

Michael Gove: No, the hon. Gentleman is right. We must ensure that we have granular information about what is happening on the ground. We are working with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive and with businesses in Northern Ireland to do that, and I will visit Northern Ireland at the earliest safe opportunity.

Mr Speaker: The next Member has withdrawn, so I now call Bob Stewart—[*Interruption.*]

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker; I was slightly surprised and had to take my mask off.

There are six commercial ports and harbours in Northern Ireland. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the infrastructure is in place, as well as the Government officials required to ensure that traffic coming into or out of Northern Ireland is dealt with speedily and with as much efficiency as possible, perhaps even getting better in the future?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is right, and we all recall his distinguished service—not just on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, but in keeping people safe in his previous career, when he served with such distinction. The infrastructure and the individuals are in place to ensure the smooth operation of the protocol as far as possible. In particular I thank Edwin Poots, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in the Northern Ireland Executive who, notwithstanding his own understandable personal reservations about the protocol, has done everything possible to help Northern Ireland's farmers and food producers.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP) [V]: I welcome the move to remedy the VAT margin scheme for second-hand cars, as that will bring great relief to many who work in the industry. I want to thank the Minister and his team, and all those in the Northern Ireland Office, for their proactive engagement with me on that issue.

I welcome that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is listening and taking action, but some issues remain. What hope and reassurance can he give to a young mother in my constituency whose 11-week-old baby for health reasons requires a specific milk formula produced in the Netherlands? Because of the protocol, she now cannot source that product to feed her child, and her local pharmacist, who sells around 50 packs a month to local families, cannot source it from any wholesaler in Northern Ireland. The milk is stuck somewhere in transit because of the protocol, while my constituent's baby cries in pain and hunger. What will the right hon. Gentleman do today to address that serious health and welfare issue?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that rather than the rigorous implementation of the protocol championed by the hon. Members for Foyle (Colum Eastwood) and for North Down (Stephen Farry), which causes such problems, we need the Government to fix the problems caused by the protocol, and restore the integrity of the UK's internal market?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that terrible case. We will get straight on it and look specifically at how we can ensure that her constituent receives the products she needs.

On the broader point about working to ensure that the protocol operates effectively and safeguards the integrity of the United Kingdom, I thank the hon. Lady for her work; as well as Minister Poots, I also thank Minister Diane Dodds and the First Minister, Arlene Foster, for raising these issues with me in a timely and urgent fashion.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I know that the Union is very important to my right hon. Friend—as it is to me; we are both Scots born. Will he reassure me that he will do everything to ensure unfettered access between GB and Northern Ireland?

Michael Gove: Yes, absolutely. Let me stress again that many of us in this House had reservations about aspects of the protocol, but now that it is in place, we have to do everything possible in order to ensure that it works for the people of Northern Ireland. They are an integral part of the United Kingdom. It is our moral duty to do everything to stand up for them.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I must say I feel vindicated today in not voting for the protocol. I must ask: what did we do to Members on the Government Benches to be screwed over by this protocol? Ask your hearts, every single one: what did we do? What has happened with the protocol is that it has ruined trade in Northern Ireland, and it is an insult to our intelligence to say it is a teething problem. Tell that to my constituents. Tell that to my constituent who tried to move home on Sunday from Essex to Broughshane and was turned back at Cairnryan because she had products in her white van that were her own personal products—disgraceful.

This grace period needs to be extended by at least 12 months. We need to upgrade the training of people in GB who are involved in trade. We need to remove the requirement for health certificates at all product levels, not just at single levels, and we need to remove the groupage recertification and relax things in the way they have been relaxed immediately in the Republic of Ireland.

I welcome what the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has said about VAT margins, but I want to see the meat on the bone on that. I welcome what has been said about steel tariffs, because if those go ahead, the Government will have ruined manufacturing businesses in Northern Ireland. I cannot attract them in if we have a steel tariff. I ask the Minister to move on these other matters that are being listed—the list is growing—and to move immediately.

Michael Gove: I am sorry to hear about the distress faced by the lady who was moving from Essex to Broughshane. We will do everything possible to investigate the specific case and ensure that sort of thing does not happen again. On the broader points the hon. Member makes, I am grateful for the constructive approach he has taken to the steps that we have taken so far, but he is absolutely right that more needs to be done, and I look forward to working with him to do that.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con) [V]: Last year, my right hon. Friend reached an agreement with the EU on a grace period to apply to supermarkets for the first quarter of this year. Can he confirm that this

agreement is being respected in full by the relevant authorities? How many supermarkets and suppliers are benefiting from these arrangements?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. Supermarkets are benefiting from it—Asda, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Iceland among others—but it is important that we do everything we can to monitor its effective operation, and that is why I am so grateful to the British Retail Consortium for reaching out today with some specific suggestions as to how we can improve things. I am also grateful to him, because I know that like all my colleagues he is a dedicated upholder of the integrity of the United Kingdom and its citizens.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) [V]: We clearly must make the protocol work and work well. It seems to me, certainly from evidence that the Select Committee has been hearing, that many of the problems have been created, understandably, by the late agreement of the protocol, leading to a lack of understanding, knowledge and confidence among businesses in GB exporting into NI. Can the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster assure me that the issues of lack of knowledge and understanding are being addressed not just by his Department but by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, because when GB business knows what it needs to do, it will do it well and Northern Ireland will succeed?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is precisely right. The responsibility is mine, but it is also that of my colleagues at BEIS, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Northern Ireland Office and elsewhere, and we are working together with the trader support service. We hope to ensure that some of the misunderstandings and confusion that may have arisen are addressed. I am grateful for the work of his Select Committee in helping in that endeavour.

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

1.34 pm

Sitting suspended.

Elections: May 2021

1.37 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the May 2021 elections.

The Minister for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith) [V]: Safe and secure elections are the cornerstone of any democracy, and Parliament's decision, as set out in primary legislation, is that these polls should go ahead in May. Due to the pandemic, many of these elections have already been delayed by a year, but voters have a right to be heard and to decide who governs them. During the pandemic, local authorities will have taken many serious decisions impacting directly on residents, on matters from council tax to road closures, and those are important issues on which elected representatives should be held to account.

Given the situation, however, we are, as the Prime Minister set out last week, keeping this position under review. Any change would require very careful consideration, including by this House, and would need to be based on robust evidence. There should be a high bar for any delay.

I remind the House that we have already seen polls go ahead despite coronavirus, in this country—for example, council elections in Edinburgh and Aberdeen—and internationally, with other countries holding general elections. Since the announcement of the postponement of the 2020 elections, we have been working towards holding them in a covid-secure manner, and we will put in place a strong set of measures to support this. Voters have a choice as to how they participate in elections—at the polling station, by proxy or by post. We want to maintain that choice, but we recognise that the pandemic may change people's needs and preferences. We actively encourage anybody who is shielding or who would prefer not to attend a polling station to apply for an absent vote instead of going in person. We will bring forward additional measures to support absent voting, including extending the ability to appoint a proxy, so that anybody who might be affected by covid-19 in the days before the poll is still able to make their voice heard. The Government this week set out our plan to roll out vaccines at pace, which will ensure that the most vulnerable are protected and provide a route map towards relaxing the restrictions when safe to do so.

We have worked closely with the Electoral Commission on the production of guidance to aid all involved. This guidance is based on the latest public health advice and will be updated as necessary ahead of the polls. We have been working across Government to ensure that any activity required for participation in and the delivery of the polls is technically allowed under covid regulations. I thank local government officials, who have stepped up to the mark enormously in dealing with new and challenging issues, in many cases since last March. That should be recognised. We are grateful to them for all the work they have done, and we will continue to work closely with them and all involved in elections to support them in delivering the elections successfully.

Finally, hon. and right hon. Members will know very well the importance of campaigning and providing information to voters. As well as the technical aspects of elections, voters rightly expect that campaigning activity should only be carried out safely. I can confirm that the

[Chloe Smith]

Government have also worked with the parliamentary parties panel to ensure that we are aware of the views of political parties, and we will continue to do that. We recognise the importance of parliamentary scrutiny of this area. We will continue to keep the House updated on the preparations for the safe holding of these elections, which are an important upcoming moment in our shared civic life.

Cat Smith: It is a pleasure to see the Minister respond to the urgent question. I wish her well with her continued recovery.

As the Minister set out, elections have been suspended for more than a year, and a record number of polls are now set to take place on the same day, with every elector able to cast a ballot in one election or another. It is deeply disappointing that the Government have failed to provide clarity on how these polls will be covid-secure.

Clarity is urgently needed by local councils, electoral staff, candidates, campaigners and, of course, the public. This is yet another example of the Conservative Government being too slow to act. Ministers have had many months to make the necessary changes to protect our democratic process. Instead, they are treating these elections like business as usual. Across the world, countries have demonstrated that elections can take place safely with the right safety measures in place. National elections were held in the US, New Zealand, Singapore, Iceland and Lithuania last year. Labour has consistently called for safer voting methods to be introduced, including voting over multiple days and an all-postal ballot. Will the Minister explain why the Government have taken no action so far? Will she also confirm whether the Conservative party chair took advice from Conservative party candidates about the timeframe for a possible delay? The scheduling of elections should come above party political advantage.

Will the Minister confirm, in no uncertain terms, that these elections will not be postponed in an irresponsible, last-minute U-turn? Unless councils are informed of changes in good time, unnecessary expenditure will be wasted on the printing of poll cards and other preparatory work. Given the crippling Government cuts, councils simply cannot afford to be caught on the hoof here. Electoral staff have expressed deep anxiety about running these elections safely without additional funding, so will the Minister produce clear guidance and training for local authorities about how to make polling stations and the count covid-secure?

High numbers of electoral staff are volunteers, with many in the high-risk category under covid-19 guidance. Does the Minister expect at-risk people to risk their health to support the safe running of these elections? The Welsh Labour Government have been working to ensure that elections can still go ahead safely. What steps have the Government taken to co-operate with the devolved nations? Finally, does the Minister share my concern that the Government's lack of preparation will force many people to choose between their health and their right to vote?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I call the Minister to answer, let me say that the hon. Lady took rather longer than the time allocated to her. I simply warn everyone taking part in the statement

today that I will not allow long questions or speeches from people who are meant to be asking questions. I know that the Minister will give short answers. I am determined that in one hour, we will get all 25 people on the Order Paper in to ask their questions. If we do not, those who do not get to ask their question can blame those who took too long in asking theirs.

Chloe Smith: I will do my best to help you to get this moving as quickly as we would all like, Madam Deputy Speaker. First, on a personal note, may I thank the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) for her support? It was nice of her to say that. I have been grateful for lots of support from across the House as I have treatment for breast cancer.

On the hon. Lady's questions, however, I am afraid that she is wrong to take a party political position on this issue. The Labour party has perhaps been so busy telling itself a story that it has been spinning that it has not looked at how we can actually get it right. It is simply not the case that there has been no action. If she had listened to my opening statement, she would have heard that loud and clear. I absolutely agree that it needs to be done in good time, and it has been. As I have set out in the House, in parliamentary questions and in working with, for example, the election administration sector, there is a record of all the preparation that has been done and that is being taken careful account of ready for May.

The hon. Lady asked specifically whether there would be clear guidance. As I said, there will be. She rightly asked about staff, who are of course a concern. Naturally, we want to make sure that staff in any employment sector are protected in their workplace, as has been the case during the pandemic across the breadth of business sectors, public and private, up and down the land. That is being accounted for in the careful planning.

The hon. Lady also understandably asked about co-operation with the devolved Administrations, because elections are taking place in England, Scotland and Wales. Although it is naturally not my responsibility to answer for the polls in Wales and Scotland, I hope that a sensible position can be achieved that allows voters the clearest opportunity to go to the polls and, as I said, to hold those who have the privilege of governing them to account. That is important in these elections. It is my intention to carry on working in the collaborative way that I do with my counterparts in those Administrations to assist that happening across the Administrations wherever it is needed.

Finally—I will not dignify it with more of a response than this—the very idea that somebody would be forced to choose between their health and their vote is simply not an issue in this case. It degrades the debate we ought to be having about how to have sensible elections, and it undermines the sensible work that has gone on by those who are responsible for running elections across the country, to whom I pay tribute.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): On behalf of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, I send our best wishes to my hon. Friend for her recovery. I ask her to reflect on the legal maxim that justice delayed is justice denied, and that democracy delayed is democracy denied. Will she ensure that, if there is any possibility of delay, it will be for the shortest

possible time? After all, this is one situation to which an algorithm, no matter how finessed, will not be the answer. Can she confirm that any delay to elections in England will require new primary legislation?

Chloe Smith: It is the case that a new election date would require a change in legislation. For that reason, we can all understand that the bar for change would have to be quite high. I pray in aid the point that elections have already been held in this country and other countries, so we have seen that elections can be held. As I say, the bar for change ought to be set fairly high; that is in addition to the point about primary legislation.

I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for his kind words and for all his and his Committee's work. I also thank him for his important underlining of the maxim that democracy is very important indeed and should not be delayed disproportionately.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): We look forward to seeing the Minister back at the Dispatch Box; much as I like the Leader of the House, he was a poor substitute throughout the final stages of the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill.

Last month in Holyrood, legislation was endorsed by all parties to establish contingency measures in respect of May's elections. The legislation was developed with the Electoral Management Board for Scotland and the Electoral Commission and makes provision for an earlier deadline in respect of postal voting applications, given the increased demand that would be expected. Dissolution will take place not in March but instead on the eve of the poll, to allow Parliament still to function and pass emergency legislation in what is clearly a very volatile situation. There is scope to allow polling to take place over more than one day, if needed, to support physical distance in polling stations.

At the moment, it is our expectation that elections can go ahead as planned, but I think we would all agree in this House that it is prudent and responsible to ensure that we have planned for every eventuality, so that the poll can be conducted safely and indeed fairly during the pandemic. Although we in the SNP have no skin in the game in terms of what happens at elections in England, it is clear that this Government are less well prepared for an election that cannot be treated as business as usual. Has the Minister looked at the measures adopted in Scotland, and will the Government be following suit with similar primary legislation to ensure that voter safety and confidence can be maintained during this year's election?

Chloe Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words; it is good to see him, and I look forward to being back. I also thank him for making sure that our House is kept informed of what is going on in Holyrood. It is important that we have that mutual awareness, but may I gently pick him up on the idea that this Parliament and this Government are in some way less prepared? That is simply not the case.

There is a very full record of preparation that has gone on to ensure that the elections for which we are responsible will be a success. I laid that out in my statement and, as I undertook, I will be keeping the House further updated with more as it comes forward, for example in terms of guidance. However, I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that I am aware of those parallel plans and,

as I said in an earlier response, I also intend to continue working collaboratively with my opposite numbers in the two other Administrations to ensure that, wherever sensible, we have the right kind of co-operation.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con) [V]: Over the past year, as the Minister mentioned in her opening remarks, elections have successfully been held in the United States and across Europe, and indeed Germany is set to hold its elections in a few months' time. Does my hon. Friend therefore agree that if these countries are able to successfully hold their elections, there is no reason for us not to do so?

Chloe Smith: That is a very important point. We have these examples going on, and elections have successfully been held both inside our country and around the world. It is important therefore to remember that people have that appetite to cast their vote and that it can be done safely, and that is what we are working towards.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is great to see the Minister; on behalf of my colleagues, I wish her all the best for a full and speedy recovery.

I am personally very keen to have elections in May and even keener for the Government to make the decision now and stick to it. Clarity is important to stop the uncertainty that leads to instability within local authorities up and down the country. What adds to that instability, in three parts of England—Somerset, Cumbria and North Yorkshire—is a ludicrous plan for a top-down reorganisation of local government in the midst of a pandemic. Does the Minister agree that it is far wiser for those authorities to focus on delivering social care, education, housing and economic development, rather than labouring under a pointless, badly-timed, top-down reorganisation?

Chloe Smith: I will not anger you, Madam Deputy Speaker, by going too deeply into another Department's brief, but I will undertake to raise that point with my colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: My hon. Friend will be well aware that this is about not just 6 May when elections are held, but the deadline date of 29 March when the elections are advertised. Will she undertake to keep the House updated on the position so that, if these elections have to be delayed at all, that is done in a timely fashion and everyone can plan for them appropriately?

Chloe Smith: Yes, I certainly am giving that undertaking to the House today, and I am keen to do that because it is extremely important. My hon. Friend makes the right point about the lead-in that there is to any election. To the example of the date he gave I can add that there is a huge tail of logistical organisation that has to go on, to ensure that there are the right venues; that the right materials have been produced, printed or distributed; and that staff have been recruited. All that is the stuff of running elections. It is a huge amount of work, for which, as I say, I thank officials across the country. His point reminds us that we therefore have to give people guidance in good time, which is what I am undertaking to do. That is in addition to the preparation that has already been ongoing for the past year to ensure that we are looking at covid-secure elections this May.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab) [V]: I, too, extend my best wishes to the Minister.

Bristol has a particularly complicated set of elections coming up. We have the all-outs for councillors; the mayoral election; the West of England Combined Authority metro mayor election; and the police and crime commissioner election. That would be difficult enough for people to get their heads round in ordinary times, so what extra support will the Minister be able to give to local authorities such as Bristol's to try to ensure that people understand what they are voting for and quite what is up for election? I am thinking, in particular, of those who perhaps do not have the best command of the English language, and those who have visual disabilities or other reasons why this would be particularly tricky for them.

Chloe Smith: I am grateful for that point and for the hon. Lady's personal wishes. She rightly says that at any election there is a need to make sure that the public are well informed of what it is for, how to go about it and how to have their voice heard. The Electoral Commission will, as always, be performing that role ahead of this election. That is in addition to dealing with the specific circumstances of this year, where, as I have said, we will be working together to ensure that there is the right guidance to help people approach these elections with safety, as well as the usual election issues, in mind. All of that together is absolutely the work ahead of us. This is made a little more complicated by the fact that this is already, in part, a postponed set of elections. This House took the decision to postpone a set of elections not at all lightly, in the knowledge that greater complexity would arise later, and that we cannot keep postponing elections and then have to be able to lay the plans and deliver them successfully. That is what we are now doing.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con) [V]: Obviously, candidates for these elections are keen to get their message across. The Conservatives have rightly suspended in-person campaigning, and I believe the Labour party has taken similar action. Does the Minister share my concern that Liberal Democrat activists are being encouraged to do face-to-face campaigning at the moment? Will she seek agreement between parties to put candidates on a level footing and ensure that all campaigning is absolutely safe?

Chloe Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for that point, as it is important. It goes to the heart of the fact that voters expect to be able to participate safely in elections, and at a time such as this they expect everybody to play their part in that, so I fully endorse the way she has put that question. What I will be able to do assist voters in this case is to work with the Electoral Commission to provide guidance on the safe, technical delivery of polls. I am also inviting political parties to play a responsible role, in ensuring that they are providing information to voters in a safe way that does them the credit they deserve at an important moment of choice, but one that takes place in unusual times.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab) [V]: There is a history with this Government of treating disabled and vulnerable people as an afterthought, so it is not surprising that today the Minister has not offered any real detail on how they are going to ensure that everybody who is shielding can play a full part in these elections. When will that detail be forthcoming?

Chloe Smith: I referred to this in my opening statement, and proudly so. I am pleased that the hon. Lady has emphasised it once again; she is right to do so, and I fully share her concern that it should be delivered. Therefore, I will be bringing to the House the relevant piece of secondary legislation that allows people to extend their application for proxy voting. I look forward to discussing the details with her. But prior to such a change, I think the first point is actually to say that absent vote arrangements already exist. As I said in my opening statement, I encourage anybody who is concerned about physically attending the polling station this year to apply now for a postal vote so that they have it in hand. Those are the ways in which we can help everybody to be confident and comfortable at these elections, which is what we must do. These elections are a very important moment and should not be delayed. They should be supported to be a success, and that is precisely what we are doing.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): Redcar and Cleveland have been left without an elected police and crime commissioner for a number of months after our Labour police and crime commissioner resigned following an investigation into him. As last year's elections were postponed, there will be a knock-on effect on the length of term faced by both the Tees Valley Mayor and the PCC for Cleveland, who are both now facing three-year terms instead of four. May I urge the Government to consider reviewing these term lengths in the event that there are any further delays to the elections? The Labour party has left Cleveland police in a mess, and it will take us enough time to fix it.

Chloe Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this point, because he reminds us of the consequence of the first postponement. It is therefore important to think this issue through carefully again, rather than to reach easily for the argument for yet more delay. He will have heard me say clearly that I am not in favour of delay and I think that there are very strong arguments for the elections to be able to go ahead safely, so it is not my intention to have to do as he asks. None the less, I will take his point away and discuss it with colleagues in the Department responsible—the Home Office—so that his concerns can be properly understood.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab) [V]: It is a great pleasure to see the Minister on the road to recovery; I wish her well. Does she agree that, for these elections to have validity, we need people not only to be able to vote in them safely, but to be able to campaign in them safely? Will she do a lot more than what she has laid out so far and work with the other political parties that will be competing in these elections in England to ensure that there is agreement about a way in which the elections can be held safely and which can allow political parties to campaign in them as fully as possible?

Chloe Smith: I am very grateful for the tone that the hon. Gentleman strikes. It is important that there should always be a level playing field in our elections; that is a critical principle of our democracy. I am therefore keen to secure the kind of cross-party consensus of which he speaks. If he and his Labour colleagues would like to begin by creating that today, that is excellent. In addition to what I have said today, I point him to the written ministerial statement that I provided to the House late

last year, in which I referred to the technical area of spending limits. Given the circumstances, it would be quite understandable if parties and candidates wished to be able to use more digital methods this year to campaign and properly communicate with voters. I hope that that piece of information will be helpful to the hon. Gentleman in thinking through how voters can be assisted to get the widest range of information ahead of these polls.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) [V]: It is very good to see the excellent Minister at the virtual Dispatch Box.

Here in Northamptonshire, we have a problem. Two new unitary authorities will be created on 1 April. If the elections are delayed, I assume that that council will be governed by the shadow authority. Those councillors will be going into their seventh year without being re-elected, so I hope that we can press on with the elections on the right date. Could the Minister look at the possibility of allowing candidates to use freepost delivery through Royal Mail for their election literature, as that would be safe and would help in the campaign?

Chloe Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind comments and for again underlining the consequences of there already having been a delay to these elections. He makes a good point about the use of Royal Mail, which gives me the opportunity to reassure the House that my officials and I are in touch with Royal Mail to be sure that it is part of elections—for example, postal votes will be capable of being delivered properly, which is, of course, what voters would expect. I will take away his point about those particular elections and election addresses to give it proper consideration, but I would note that there are already many ways of providing information to voters in a safe manner that I hope can be made use of.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): In Warrington, all-out borough council, parish council and police and crime commissioner elections were due to take place last May but were delayed until this year and risk being delayed again if the Government fail to get a grip on covid transmission, particularly in the light of this new strain. In the US, early voting and drive-through ballot boxes enabled a historically high turnout. The Government have had many months to prepare and adapt to protect our democratic process, so why have they failed to take the initiative and introduce changes following successful international models to ensure no further delays for voters in Warrington and elsewhere?

Chloe Smith: Labour Members here today are so keen to paint a picture of delay that they are not seeing the wood for the trees. The point is that preparations have already been made. If the hon. Member were to speak to her colleagues in the Welsh Labour Government, she would know that those colleagues and I have already had extensive discussions about the merits of, for example, early voting. I have also had those conversations with administrators across the relevant area, who do not necessarily share the merits of that argument. I do not think there is a clear case for early voting, because it introduces extra complexity at a time when what voters need are polls delivered safely and easily.

I also take this opportunity to emphasise that I have considered the case for all-postal ballots, which has occasionally been raised in the House, but there are some drawbacks to that—namely, that it would prevent people from being able to exercise their preference when it comes to how they vote at elections. As I said at the outset, it is important to help people to take their choice in how they vote. That is why our comprehensive set of preparations gives rise to people being able to apply as early as they wish for a postal vote, and I encourage people to do so; to take advantage of new arrangements for a slightly extended proxy scheme, which makes sure that nobody would be excluded; and, finally, to vote in person if they wish, at which point polling stations will be covid-secure.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con) [V]: May I say how delighted I am to see my hon. Friend in her usual robust style with a good grip on her brief? Following on from the previous question, in terms of those who are pushing for a full postal vote election, what would be the lead time to put that in place? I assume that quite a lot would have to be done to make everybody vote by post in this election.

Chloe Smith: Yes, there is a lengthy lead time, and it would require a lot to be done. I do not think it is the right thing to do, so I can confirm to the House that any such preparation has not been laid for that.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: It is extremely important that the democratic process is able to go ahead if it is safe to do so. Does the Minister agree that we need to make voting as safe as possible? What more needs to be done to encourage greater take-up of postal voting and to ensure that the applications can be processed in time?

Chloe Smith: I am grateful for the tone that the hon. Gentleman strikes, because this is critically important. I would like the message to go out loud and clear across our parties that postal voting will be a sensible option at these elections for obvious reasons. As I said, the Electoral Commission will also play a large part in this, with its usual role of public information campaigns ahead of all polls, and in this case we are already drawing up the ways in which we will encourage the public to apply for absent voting arrangements.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con) [V]: Does my hon. Friend agree that, with Great Britain seen as the gold standard for well-organised elections and the peaceful transfer of power, it should be perfectly possible to run a covid-secure set of local elections, having had over a year's notice to prepare for them?

Chloe Smith: Yes, it is possible, and that is precisely what we are doing. I am very glad of my hon. Friend's support for that.

Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab) [V]: Across the world, postal votes have been a crucial part of delivering covid-safe elections. In the UK, however, postal vote application forms require physical printing to return the form, creating a significant barrier to many who do not have access to a printer. For the clinically vulnerable, this may be their only route to register. What steps are the Government taking to introduce fully digital application forms for postal votes?

Chloe Smith: I really welcome the hon. Lady's question, because she clearly displays an important knowledge of what is ahead of us. I am looking at this particular area for the polls that are ahead. It is not something that is necessarily capable of being delivered for these May elections, but it is something that I am looking at for the future, so I look forward to keeping her closely informed as that development goes on.

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con) [V]: I love campaigning, but when the national lockdown was declared, I stopped campaigning as that was the right thing to do. I was therefore incredibly disappointed to see not one, not two, but several examples of the Liberal Democrats across the country exploiting a loophole to keep delivering literature. Does my hon. Friend agree that the messaging is perfectly clear: stay home, protect the NHS and save lives?

Chloe Smith: It is really important to emphasise that point in the midst of this debate. We are having this debate because we are in a public health crisis and in a pandemic, and we therefore have a duty to the public to ensure that important civic functions, which include elections, go ahead only in a safe way. That is what we are absolutely committed to delivering in this case. It is also important that political parties play their part in that, as so many other workers and volunteers across all sorts of sectors across the country over the months have been able to do. It is that kind of behaviour that we will also have to look for in the delivery of these important events this spring.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): May I also wish the Minister a speedy and full recovery?

With numerous elections due to take place across the different parts of the United Kingdom, it seems that the Government are a barrier to the critical changes needed to our voting methods to deliver covid-secure elections. For example, the police and crime commissioner elections are the responsibility of the UK Government, making it impossible for the Welsh Labour Government to introduce new voting methods without causing widespread chaos and confusion on polling day. Can the Minister explain why the Government have so far failed to heed the calls from the Welsh Labour Government to make voting safer in the upcoming polls?

Chloe Smith: I do not think I recognise the picture that the hon. Gentleman paints. I can assure him of my very good relationships with Julie James and other colleagues in the Welsh Government. Indeed, I am expecting to speak to Julie later this week, so, should there be some fundamental misunderstanding about how we can all deliver polls safely, I look forward to taking that up with him and with her.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con) [V]: We cannot predict the future or be totally certain of what the situation will be in May, but I am pleased that my hon. Friend is looking at all sorts of options in order to be able to do this on time. Elections are vital in any democracy and we are already a year behind. Some have called for a further year's postponement, which would seem to fly in the face of our democratic processes. Can she assure me that, if any delay were required for health reasons, it

would be not an arbitrary or lengthy postponement but the minimum possible, so that we could hold the votes as soon as possible?

Chloe Smith: Yes, I can give that commitment. As the House will, I hope, have heard me say clearly today, I am not saying that the polls are to be postponed or that they should be postponed; we are carefully keeping the situation under review. I hope that, in answer to several questions today, I have been able clearly to make the point that that needs to be done carefully and that that is what we are doing.

My hon. Friend makes the excellent additional point that we cannot take this lightly. We have already postponed a set of elections once; we cannot postpone democracy forever. Voters expect to be able to have their choice and they shall have their choice. We have to be able to apply ourselves to running covid-secure elections, which is precisely what the comprehensive set of preparations that I have been leading has been doing, and I will be able to keep the House updated on that basis.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) [V]: I strongly support the Government's plan to go ahead with the May elections, which are crucial to our democracy. Given that many more people may well need or want a postal vote, will the Minister bring forward, before the elections, measures for enhanced security? There are worries about fraud and it is surely important that anyone who exercises a postal vote should have just the one vote and they should make the decision.

Chloe Smith: I welcome my right hon. Friend's vigilance on electoral fraud, which is extremely important. We all want all forms of voting to be secure, and it is helpful of him to point out the fact that postal and proxy voting should be just as secure as when someone casts their vote in person at a polling station. In respect of both the elections we are discussing today and future elections, this issue is a top priority of mine. My right hon. Friend can look forward to the measures that I will bring forward, in line with the Conservative party manifesto, to improve the security of our postal and proxy voting systems and some other aspects of electoral integrity. We look forward to much longer discussions on those issues.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): The upcoming local elections will see a record number of elections with various different voting systems in use on the same day. In normal times, this would cause an immense logistical challenge; given the added pressure caused by the need to run safe elections during a pandemic, will the Minister outline why local authorities have not been given any additional funding to ensure that voters are able to exercise their democratic right without risking their health?

Chloe Smith: [*Inaudible.*]—based on an inaccuracy. Up until November last year, the Government had provided a total of £4.3 billion to local authorities to help with pandemic costs, and on 17 December last year the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government allocated to councils in England a further £1.55 billion non-ring-fenced grant for covid-19 pressures, which explicitly included the concept that the money might need to be used to support the running of covid-secure local elections.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con) [V]: I thank the Minister for clarifying the situation regarding the prospect of all-postal votes. Can she reassure the House that steps have been taken to address previous concerns expressed about this method of voting?

Chloe Smith: Yes. There have been some trials of all-postal voting in the past, under a previous Government. My officials and I have looked at that evidence, and we will continue to look at any other evidence that is provided. As I said in answer to an earlier question, I do not think all-postal voting is the right way forward—it takes away from people an element of choice as to how they wish to cast their vote—but I hope that my reassurances about the importance of electoral integrity generally and about making sure that any method of casting a vote is absolutely secure are helpful to my hon. Friend and to the House more generally.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: What steps has the Cabinet Office taken to ensure that people who are asymptomatic of covid-19 but instructed to self-isolate are able to cast their vote? Will the Minister consider changing emergency proxy voting rules to enable those testing positive on the day of the election to vote via proxy?

Chloe Smith: This is an excellent point on which to end the session. This is exactly the measure that I was referring to earlier, which will complete the set of preparations to enable that to happen for anybody who might be affected by covid-19 in the few days before an election, when, traditionally, it would have been too late to apply for an absent vote. The details of this scheme will be coming to the House shortly.

This also allows me to recap on the point that I have been making throughout this session, which is that to change the date of these elections at this stage would require primary legislation, which is a high bar and is not something to be taken either lightly or quickly, and I know that the House will understand that. That is why we are keeping this point under review. Clearly, given the Prime Minister's announcements of further national restrictions, circumstances have changed, but we are undertaking a careful review of the situation, being conscious of the timescales that would be required to make any changes were they strictly necessary.

I hope the House will have understood from my tone that we are all extremely keen to ensure that democracy goes ahead and does not suffer further delays. I look forward to bringing those other details to the House, as such scrutiny is important and hon. and right hon. Members have a close interest, as we all should, in helping our residents be best informed about the choices in front of them.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am delighted to note that we took exactly the right amount of allocated time for that statement. I am extremely grateful to all colleagues for their brief questions and, in particular, to the Minister for her brief and timely answers. I am sure that all colleagues join me in wishing her well and saying how good it is to see her looking so healthy and full of energy. We look forward to seeing her back here with us as soon as possible. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

In order to allow the safe entry and exit of Members, Ministers and spokesmen, I will suspend the House for three minutes.

2.21 pm

Sitting suspended.

Mental Health Act Reform

2.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): With permission, I would like to make a statement on reforming the Mental Health Act. Even amidst the pandemic, I am enormously grateful for the work that my team and the NHS have done, led by Sir Simon Wessely and Claire Murdoch and my hon. Friend the Minister for mental health, to deliver this White Paper, which we published today, to bring mental health legislation into the 21st century.

We are committed as a Government, and as a nation, to see mental health treated on a par with physical health. We are increasing funding for mental health services to record levels, with £2.3 billion extra each year being invested through the NHS long-term plan, and an immediate £0.5 billion in place to support mental health services given the very significant pressures they are under. Our mental health services are now helping more people than ever before. Services are there for the most serious mental illnesses, although those, of course, are under significant pressure. Services are there for better community support through 24/7 crisis services and establishing liaison in A&E, and supporting people to manage their own mental health.

This programme of transformation is ambitious, and as we support mental health services now, so we must bring up to date the legislative framework for the long term. The Mental Health Act 1983 was created so that people who have severe mental illness and present a risk to themselves or others can be detained and treated for their protection and the protection of those around them, but so much has changed since the Act was put into place, nearly 40 years ago. We now understand a lot more about mental health. Public attitudes around mental health have changed significantly for the better. We now have a better understanding of, and practice for, how we can best support people with learning disabilities and/or autism. We are also concerned by the growing number of people being detained, inequalities among those who are detained, and the length of time that people are spending detained under the Act.

So, after a generation, we must bring the Mental Health Act into the 21st century. The previous Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), asked Professor Sir Simon Wessely to lead a review into what a modern mental health Act should look like. I thank her for her work, and I am so grateful to Sir Simon and his vice-chairs for their dedication. As I said to the House last year on its publication, the Wessely review is one of the finest pieces of work on the treatment of mental health that has been done anywhere in the world. I know that the review was welcomed across the House. We committed in our manifesto to delivering the required changes, and I am grateful to the Prime Minister for his emphatic support.

Sir Simon's review shows compellingly that the Mental Health Act does not work as well as it should for patients or their loved ones—that the Act goes too far in removing people's autonomy and does not give people enough control over their care. I am delighted to set out our full response to that review in our White Paper, which, together with my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, I have laid before the House.

The White Paper sets out plans for a landmark new mental health Act. The new Act will ensure that patients are put at the centre of decisions about their own care; that everyone is treated with respect; and that the law is only used to compel treatment where absolutely necessary. The White Paper has been developed in close consultation with those with the greatest expertise—the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Rethink Mental Illness, Mind, the Centre for Mental Health and countless practitioners on the frontline—and I thank them all.

There are four pillars to this work; I should like to take a moment to update the House on all of them. First, we will give patients a voice in their own care, which we know leads to better engagement in treatment. We will put care and treatment plans and advance choice documents in statute for the first time, so that patients are more closely involved in the development of their care, and so that they can have confidence that if they lose capacity because of illness, their preferences will be properly considered. We are making it easier for patients to challenge decisions about their care, creating a new right to choose a nominated person who is best placed to look after their interests, and increasing patients' access to the independent tribunal to provide vital independent scrutiny of detention. In his report, Sir Simon recommended that one of the best ways to ensure dignified care is to ensure that patients can expect the privacy of their own en-suite room. We have already committed £400 million of funding to deliver that, and we are building new mental health hospitals, with two schemes already approved and with more to come.

Secondly, we will address the disparities that currently exist within the application of the Mental Health Act. Black people are currently four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act than white people, and black people are 10 times more likely to be placed on a community treatment order. We also know that people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds often engage with services later, and our plans to enhance patient choice, increase scrutiny of decisions and improve a patient's right to challenge will help us to improve service provision for all. On top of that, we have already announced our new patient and carer race equality framework, as recommended by the review, and we are developing the use of culturally appropriate advocates, so that patients from all backgrounds can be supported in making their voice heard.

Thirdly, it is important that the Act supports patients within the criminal justice system. We will make sure that, where people in prison require treatment in a mental health hospital, they are transferred in a timely way, and we will support rapid diversion from custody to care where appropriate so that people in our criminal justice system can get the right care in the right place at the right time, while we fulfil our fundamental duty to keep the public safe.

Finally, in our manifesto, we committed to improving how people with learning disabilities and autistic people are treated under the Act. Until now, the use of powers in the Act did not distinguish between people with mental illness on the one hand, and people with learning disabilities and/or autism on the other. That is wrong. Needs are different and the law should be different, too. That is all part of treating everyone with respect. We therefore propose reforms to limit the scope to detain people under the Act where their needs are due to their

learning disability or autism alone. In future, there will be a limit of 28 days for these detentions, which would be used to assess clinical need, and, wherever possible, we will work to ensure that appropriate support is available in the community rather than in institutional settings. I thank Baroness Hollins, Ian Birrell, Mencap and the National Autistic Society for their advocacy and for their support for these reforms.

This Act is there for us all and we want to hear as many views as possible on these plans, so we will consult widely on this White Paper and will respond later this year before we bring forward a new mental health Bill. I believe that everyone in our society has a contribution to make and that everyone should be respected for the value that they bring. It is the role of Government to support people to reach their potential, even at the most difficult of times, and to protect people when they are at their most vulnerable. That is what I believe, and I believe these reforms will help put those values into action and help give patients the dignified treatment that they deserve. I commend this statement and the White Paper to the House.

2.33 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for an advance copy of the statement. This overhaul of the Mental Health Act has been long awaited, and we welcome the White Paper and the fact that the Government have accepted the majority of the recommendations from Sir Simon Wessely's independent review of the Mental Health Act.

Without a doubt, people need to be at the heart of this legislation. Service users must be involved in framing the legislation going forward, and when we talk of numbers and statistics, we must remember that these are real people with real lives and real families. There is a web of individuals who are affected when things go wrong. Deprivation of liberty and the use of coercion can cause lasting trauma and distress. That is especially true for children and young people who find themselves in these most difficult of situations, whose voices often are not heard when decisions are being made. It is an important step that learning disabilities and autism will no longer be grounds for detention under the Act, and I am sure that we all welcome that. It is also very welcome that the recommendation on nominated persons has been included.

The best way to reduce coercion and detention is to have alternatives to admission. Will the Secretary of State please outline how that will be achieved? Community provision is vital for mental health services that are truly joined-up and, crucially, work well for patients, so will he also give reassurances on community care?

It is in our communities that we witness the harsh reality of health inequalities, which so desperately need to be addressed. Social inequalities and adverse childhood experience are the drivers of mental ill health, and they cannot be ignored. Children from the poorest 20% of households are four times more likely than those from the wealthiest 20% to have serious mental health difficulties by the age of 11. That will not be solved simply by mental health legislative changes; there must be a commitment to addressing the vast chasm of health inequalities across the country.

At present, black people are over four times more likely to be detained. We need to advance the mental health equality framework, and there must be culturally appropriate services and freedom for local areas to look at their specific population in order to have the most suitable approaches.

Mental health staffing levels are crucial to ensuring that mental health services are fit for purpose. The proposals set out by the Secretary of State go well beyond what has been committed in the long-term plan. We need to see true understanding from the Government that mental health is not about promising fancy equipment; it is about people. The promises in the White Paper rely on the workforce—our fantastic frontline mental health staff, of whom there are simply too few at present. Will the Secretary of State please outline when we will get the workforce settlement? What reassurance can he give on filling training places?

It has already taken so long to get to this point—it was the former Prime Minister who started this process, back in 2016—so will the Secretary of State provide some clarity on the timeframe going forward? Given the complexities of the legislation and the need for it to be robust, what are the plans for a joint prelegislative Committee? It is vital that the blueprint that Sir Simon Wessely's report sets out is implemented in full. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him and everyone involved for all the work they have done on this review.

We must act, and quickly. Covid has shown us how all the pressures on mental health are building. We need action now. We all know how rare these pieces of legislation are; this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get it right for some of the most vulnerable in our society. We simply must get this right for everyone who depends on these services.

Matt Hancock: I thank the shadow Minister for her thoughtful approach. I agree with the way that she described the challenge, and with her insistence that we must not just improve the legislation—and we will—but improve and continue to strengthen service provision, in particular community service provision, as an alternative to admission. That is how we turn legislation from dry words on a page into real action on the ground.

The shadow Minister is absolutely right, too, that service users must be at the heart of framing the legislation. If I may link that point to her question about the timeframe, the challenge of the timeframe is to ensure that we move fast enough to help people and get the new legislation on the statute book as quickly as reasonably possible, but at the same time continue with the consensus-based approach that we have taken.

I am very grateful, as I said, for the work of Sir Simon and the NHS team, and I am grateful that we have managed to develop this White Paper with broad consensus among those who provide mental health services and service users, and politically across the House. I think that is an important consensus to keep, and I want to try to keep it by ensuring that we take as open an approach as possible to the legislation. I am absolutely open to joint prelegislative scrutiny, and I am absolutely open to the publication of a draft Bill. Let us get the details right, and let us work together on this and keep it as consensual as possible.

[*Matt Hancock*]

I also agree with the hon. Member's point about the need to tackle broader health inequalities, and covid has laid bare some of those. That is a core part of our levelling-up agenda, and it is an important consideration for both physical and mental health. I am glad to say that this landmark White Paper, which will lead to a once-in-a-generation Bill, is proceeding with the support of the Opposition. I am really pleased about that, because this is for everyone. It is to make sure that some of the most vulnerable people in our country get the support they need and deserve.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on this White Paper and also on his continued commitment to this issue during what have been really challenging times for him and his Department in dealing with the pandemic? I fear, though, that the legislation might not be on the statute book until 2023. Meanwhile, GPs and hospitals caring for my constituents tell me that there is an increasing problem with mental health and increasing numbers of people with mental health problems, particularly young people. So what steps can my right hon. Friend take to put in place the principles that underpinned the Wessely review—I thank Sir Simon Wessely once again and his team for their work—of less coercion, better choice and control for service users, better care, and a reduction in inequality and discrimination, while dealing with the growing number of people who have mental health problems, some as a result of the pandemic?

Matt Hancock: I put on record my gratitude to my right hon. Friend. Without her, I am not sure we would have reached this point. Her dedication to this topic, both as Home Secretary and then as Prime Minister and since, has been vital, and I am grateful for the advice that she has given me in the last few months as we prepared this White Paper. I am grateful to her for appointing Sir Simon Wessely, and I am grateful to her for appointing me as Health Secretary, too. [*Laughter.*]

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about the urgent pressures right now in mental health services right across the country, so I am really pleased that during the pandemic we have been able to keep work going on the policy and the new legislation that we are proposing. At the same time, however, in hospitals and in GP surgeries right across this country, there is urgent pressure on mental health services, and we know that there are mental health impacts of the actions that we have to take to control covid.

As I said in my statement, we have put in more money in the short term, on top of the long-term plan that was agreed when my right hon. Friend was Prime Minister. We are committed to doing everything we can to support people with mental ill health and, crucially, to support people to keep their mental health strong, even if they do not have a mental illness, because these are difficult times. The good public health approach means that, just as looking out for our physical health and our mental health is important for all of us, so too is the provision of acute services for people with serious mental health conditions, which is under strain right now. We are willing to—and have—put the money in at the spending review, but we must also support the clinicians on the frontline who are working so hard right now.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: This long overdue reform of the Mental Health Act rightly seeks to ensure parity of mental health, improve access to advocacy and individualised decision making, and enable treatment within the least restrictive environment. It also attempts to address the systematic inequalities we have heard about that have existed for those with autism and learning disability. Too often their rights have been quashed within the system, and it is absolutely correct that that is addressed. The Scottish Government recognise the importance of individual rights within treatment and are currently reviewing mental health and incapacity legislation in Scotland within the mental health strategy, following on from the learning disability and autism review.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on psychology, I hear about difficulties in the current mental health system across the UK from patients themselves, including for those who self-harm but who may not meet a diagnosis of mental disorder. There exists a cycle of assessment and discharge for patients. Will the progress announced meet their treatment needs?

There is also an issue about accessibility of services for those with comorbid mental health and addiction issues, including access to rehabilitation units. How will comorbidity be addressed within the reforms? We know that those with autism are currently over-represented in our criminal justice systems. Will diversion services make sure that this great disparity in access to care in a crisis for the most vulnerable people with autism is finally addressed?

Matt Hancock: I welcome the comments of the SNP spokesman, and I appreciate her support and thoughtful questions. She is quite right about ensuring that we address the challenges that present themselves for people with autism who are, as she says, disproportionately likely to end up in the criminal justice system. This is an issue on which I have worked very closely with my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor; I am delighted that he has been able to join us for this discussion.

Part of the point of separating the attitude in law towards those with mental ill health and those with learning disabilities and autism also relates to treatment when there is an interaction with the criminal justice system. It is absolutely critical to get this right. It is difficult, and a huge number of people are working very hard to get this right on the frontline, but at the moment they are hampered by the law when it comes to how that can happen. I hope that in the future they will be supported by the law such that they can make sure people get the right support and the right treatment, whether those people are in the criminal justice system or—as with the vast majority—they are law-abiding and need support from the state because they are in a vulnerable condition.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for a comprehensive response to Sir Simon Wessely's superb review, which I was proud to commission at the request of the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), whose commitment to mental health issues has been unparalleled. However, he knows that changes in the law only matter in so far as they affect the lives of real people, and his Department's own data says that we

still have more than 2,000 people with autism and learning disabilities locked up in mental health units, often supposedly temporarily, and sadly sometimes experiencing terrible breaches of human rights, such as the frequent use of restraint.

Will my right hon. Friend use this landmark moment to follow what Italy has done and close down all such units, so that these highly vulnerable people can be looked after more humanely in the community?

Matt Hancock: Absolutely. I want to see more people cared for in appropriate settings, which will often be in the community. My right hon. Friend set the target, as Health Secretary, to reduce the number of people with autism and/or learning disabilities in secure in-patient care. The 2,000 figure that he cites is a significant reduction, I am glad to say, from when he set that target and set that work in train—almost half. I want that number to continue to fall.

Of course, where there is a criminal justice element or restriction, that can be more difficult. However, we must make sure that the treatment and setting are appropriate for each and every person. Very often, a mental health setting is not appropriate for somebody with learning disabilities or somebody with autism, for whom it can in fact be the opposite of appropriate; it could be the worst place.

My right hon. Friend will know, as the Chair of the Select Committee, that the Care Quality Commission has in fact closed a number of settings during the pandemic, and we must make sure that we build more capacity. We have the budget in the spending review to do that and some of that building work is under way. There is a huge programme of work on the physical estate side and on training staff, as the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) mentioned, as part of the legislative change. No one element of that transformation works without all the others.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) [V]: I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and the publication of the long-overdue White Paper. As has already been alluded to, the increased level of safeguards and a commitment to improving the quality of in-patient care will require a significant recruitment drive for mental health services. Recent forecasts suggest, for instance, that only 71 additional consultant psychiatrists will be added to the NHS workforce by 2023-24 against a requirement of more than 1,000 to deliver the long-term plan. What measures will he take to address the additional workforce requirements of reforming the Mental Health Act?

Matt Hancock: That is a very important question. I do not recognise the 71 figure; I will look into it and write to the hon. Lady with my full understanding of the situation, having consulted with Health Education England. The short answer to her question is that we are hiring psychiatrists and mental health nurses, who play such a critical role.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Mental health is so important, not least for our veterans, so I commend the Secretary of State for his hard work and for this excellent initiative at a busy time for the country. One area was not covered in the statement, however: child and adolescent mental health services. Will he look at

that as a matter of urgency? Families are waiting a long time for appointments at CAMHS and are living in desperate times, so I ask for his reassurance on that issue.

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely. I can give the reassurance that for those who need to access IAPT—improving access to psychological therapies—services and talking therapies for lower-level mental health conditions, the waiting time has come down quite considerably. In the latest data I saw, it was 15 days, which is a considerable improvement. The services for more serious mental health conditions are under pressure at the moment and putting more resources into them will be critical.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I thank the Secretary of State for the statement today? I also thank him for the clear way that he has put forward to help those who are vulnerable and have problems, because that is important. I ask him for clarity on what support has been given to the frontline of mental health diagnosis in the form of GP practices, which refer patients on only to see them worsen in the months it takes for them to be formally assessed and get the help they need. That is leading to a high rate of strong medicine being used, instead of counselling. The issue is important.

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman is right that GPs are the absolute frontline in treating mental ill health, not least because the first presentation of mental illness is often at general practices. Funding for those services is increasing and it is important that that continues.

As GPs form larger groups—for instance, through primary care networks—the ability to have more specialist help is strengthened. I want to see closer integration between primary care, mental health trusts and acute trusts within the NHS. Throughout its history, the NHS has held mental health trusts separately from the provision of other services. It is increasingly clear that their integration, rather than separation, is the way forward.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con) [V]: I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on the statement—and my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, whom I am delighted to see on the Treasury Bench with him.

The abolition of the appalling practice of using prison as a place of safety for those who are mentally unwell is particularly welcome. That was unfair on the individuals and on the prison staff who had to deal with them under often unsatisfactory conditions. It frequently happened because at the end of a hearing, magistrates or judges had endeavoured to find a hospital place, but none was available at the end of the day. What practical steps and resources will be put in place to ensure that a hospital place is identified before the defendant appears in court, so that they can be taken swiftly and seamlessly to an appropriate safe place, rather than prison?

Matt Hancock: Ensuring that that sort of link-up is standard practice across the criminal justice system is critical, and that is one area that the Lord Chancellor and I are working on. Ultimately, so too is the provision of enough places, because we can only send somebody to a place if the place exists. That consists of two pieces of work. The first is building more mental health hospitals, and the second is ensuring that people leave mental health hospitals when they can be better cared for in the

[*Matt Hancock*]

community. Often it is cheaper and better for a patient to be treated in the community, but provision of community services must be in place so that that discharge can take place. A significant amount of work is going on to try to improve that process.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab) [V]: May I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and welcome the publication of the White Paper? It is important in these reforms that the patient is at the centre of their treatment. The provision in the review to have mental health advocates for mental health patients is welcome, but may I suggest that the Secretary of State works closely with the community and voluntary sectors, and considers funding for those sectors so that they can provide the advocates that will be needed if the reforms go forward?

Matt Hancock: I am very happy to do that. One of the most striking and out-of-date things about the current legislation is that if somebody who is unmarried is incapacitated through illness, decisions on their behalf are automatically, in the first instance, taken by their father, rather than by their choice of who might take those decisions. That is one of the things we want to change, along with the wider point about support for the community and voluntary services that the right hon. Gentleman rightly suggests.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I wish to add my voice to the tributes paid to Sir Simon Wessely, who, as my right hon. Friend will know, drew extensively from the lived experience of those who have been through detention under the Mental Health Act. Will he join me in paying tribute to those individuals, who often had to relive harrowing and distressing experiences so that we might improve our services through this legislation, recognising that their contribution will pay dividends to those who follow their treatment in future?

Matt Hancock: I would very much like to pay tribute to those who bravely put forward their testimony of their lived experience of what it was like to be a service user under the existing Act, which formed so much of the evidence for what we need to do to make it better.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend. She was the Minister responsible for mental health during much of the framing of the review, and the initial turning of that review into this White Paper. She did that with such sensitivity and thought, and—crucially—by actively listening to what people want when they are at some of the most vulnerable points of their lives. It is not easy to do that; it requires skill and compassion, and my hon. Friend has both of those in spades.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab) [V]: I welcome the changes being proposed today because as the Mental Health Act currently stands, black people are four times more likely to be detained, and more than 10 times more likely to be subject to a community treatment order. Evidence from my constituency of Liverpool, Riverside echoes that, and my office deals with multiple requests for support from constituents from our diverse communities. Will the Minister confirm that the steps being proposed will ensure that care is accessible, culturally appropriate, and free from the levels of discrimination currently experienced?

Matt Hancock: Yes. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to draw out this point, and the figures she quotes were one of the reasons it became so urgently clear that we need to make these changes. We need to make these changes as fast as reasonably possible, but no faster. We need to bring people with us. We need to give people time to read and consider the White Paper and to look at the legislation, as drafted, as it makes its way through the House, but the figures she sets out demonstrate why it is so important that we make these changes. I am delighted that the Prime Minister has set aside the future parliamentary time to be able to make this new mental health Act a reality.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con) [V]: I very much welcome the statement and support the work this Government have done to improve mental health provision through our schools. Children and young people are a critical part of getting mental health right. Therefore, as we reform the Mental Health Act, can I have an assurance that educational settings will be at its heart?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely. We have put more support directly into schools, and we are rolling out the mental health link workers to make sure young people get that support when they need it.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) [V]: I welcome the Secretary of State's approach to this issue. Can he give an assurance that independent mental health advocates will have the power to challenge treatment decisions and to make applications for discharge?

Matt Hancock: That is one of the purposes of having advocates in this way. Exactly how we frame that in law will no doubt be a subject for nuance and debate to get it right, and I am very grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. It is very heartening to see the emphatic cross-party support for the White Paper today, and the commitment I will give to him is that we should continue to discuss, and we will continue to discuss in an open-minded way, exactly how we put the details into legislation to make sure that we get them right and continue with this consensus-based approach.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con) [V]: In December 2016, with just a few months to live, my wife received the gift of a double lung transplant courtesy of a donor, a young lady called Holly. My wife coped with the physical recovery very well, thanks to our brilliant NHS and a loving family. However, her mental recovery is ongoing. My wife fell into a depression, believing that her lungs would be rejected and she would die.

With our new opt-out organ donor scheme, thousands more will receive the gift of life. Will my right hon. Friend please advise me on what more can be done to ensure that the mental health of donor recipients is treated on an equal footing with their physical health?

Matt Hancock: It is very moving to hear the personal testimony of so many people, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his personal testimony today of how important this is. Like him, I am thrilled that we have been able to make organ donation an opt-out system, and we did that in the middle of the pandemic. He is right that it is not just about physical recovery; it is about physical and mental recovery. The point he makes so sensitively just shows how important and how broad

this subject is, and I would be very happy to work with him on this specific subject to make sure that people get the best possible services.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: Given the detention of 2,000 autistic people and people with learning disabilities who are currently trapped in inappropriate mental health units, the news that autism and learning disabilities will no longer be grounds for detention under the Mental Health Act is welcome. As well as changes to the legal framework, ending this in-patient detention means putting in place funding for community support, which has often not been available due to cuts to council budgets. Can the Secretary of State set out what additional funding the Government will be putting into those community services so that we can follow through on this much-needed reform?

Matt Hancock: We have put extra funding into those services. I absolutely appreciate, of course, that they are under pressure, especially with the pandemic. The hon. Lady is right that we must have the community services in place. Whether those are NHS community services or community services provided by councils, it is very important that they are provided in as seamless a way as possible. In fact, the best commissioning is often joint commissioning between local authorities and the NHS. I hope that a wider set of reforms to the provision of local services that have initially been set out by the NHS, but that we will be taking forward, will help us, combined with this legislation, to ensure that the link-up that she rightly addressed is much stronger.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con) [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and Sir Simon Wessely for the fantastic work that he and the team have done on the review. Personally, I would like to give a big thank you to Sir Simon Wessely, who helped me with two private Members' Bills on improving mental health care.

May I ask the Secretary of State this specific question: will there be proposals to have a review timeline in these measures—say, two years? As we often find in Parliament, putting forward legislation and how it works in practice are two separate things. Linked to that, will he clarify, with regard to parity of esteem between physical health and mental health, what proportion of NHS frontline staff dealing with individuals suffering from mental ill health have had the covid-19 vaccination, as well as patients suffering from mental ill health themselves?

Matt Hancock: I do not have the exact figure on the last question, not least because it goes up every day, I am glad to say, but the total number of NHS staff who have had the vaccination is now in the hundreds of thousands.

I am grateful for the broader point that my hon. Friend makes. There are NHS staff on the frontline who have supported people through very traumatic experiences over these past few months, during 2020 in the first peak, and then even more intensively, in some cases, over the past few weeks—and it is even harder this time round, because it has happened after a whole year of dealing with this pandemic. Making sure that we support the mental health of those working on the frontline in emergency departments and in intensive care units is incredibly important.

We have put extra resources into making sure that people get these services. Often with the NHS it is about encouraging people to come forward to access the services. Of course, Sir Simon Wessely first came to prominence working with the Army, helping it to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder. We have to make sure that we put in all possible support for frontline NHS staff who have suffered trauma because of what they have seen and what they have had to do in looking after us all in this covid pandemic. We have to make sure that they are looked after, and I make a personal commitment today that we will do all we can to look after them.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab) [V]: Sadly, one in eight LGBT+ young people aged 18 to 24 have said that they were tempted to take their own lives within the past year. Will the Secretary of State highlight how the Government intend to address this shocking statistic and ensure that every young person within the LGBT+ community has access to mental health crisis support?

Matt Hancock: One of the things that we have tried to do, which has been made more important because of the pandemic, is ensure that access to IAPT therapies is available and that mental health support is as widely available as possible. We have managed to bring down some of the waiting times even while the pandemic is on, although it is more difficult in lockdown. This is an area of a huge amount of focus for us, and particularly for the Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health. It is a very important subject on which we are working very hard.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend and the Lord Chancellor for this landmark announcement. I am a member of both the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Health and Social Care Committee, and we have covered the serious impact of the Mental Health Act in detail, particularly on people with learning disabilities and autism, and especially over the past year. Can my right hon. Friend set out what steps he is taking to change the way that people with learning disabilities and autism are treated in law?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend has done so much, alongside other members of the Select Committee and more broadly, on this piece of work to ensure that the law treats people with learning disabilities and autism separately from how it treats people with mental ill health, and as appropriately as possible for both. This has been the big development on top of the Wessely report, which is in the White Paper, and it builds on the learnings we have had over the last couple of years, when the focus on this subject has become yet more acute, and rightly so. It is about the need to ensure that people get the appropriate provision, in the community if at all possible, and, critically, the need to ensure that the legislative underpinning supports that and does not wrongly use mental health legislation when that is not the appropriate legislation. I am really glad that we have been able to build that on top of the Wessely report and that it has had such a warm welcome. Now we have to get the details right, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend, who has done so much work on this, and with others to ensure that the details of how this is framed in legislation are got right.

Discarded Human Organs

Application for emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

3.12 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I seek leave to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration: discarded human organs. I welcome the fact that the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), is in her place to hear this.

Live and deceased donor kidney transplants in Northern Ireland were paused in October last year due to covid pressures, and I understand that there is a similar picture across most of the 23 transplant units in Great Britain. Yesterday, however, I learned that a number of donor kidneys had been discarded. I was horrified. How can this House persuade the health authorities to recommence kidney donor transplant operations, to utilise public and private unused operating theatre space and to stop the scandal of discarding viable transplant organs developing?

Discarding viable organs has a disheartening impact on donors, let alone on patients. Discarding takes away from the exceptional work of our medical staff. Last year in Northern Ireland, kidney transplant surgeons operating in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust were able to utilise trust theatres and private hospital theatres at night and carried out a record number of kidney transplants. This remarkable, life-changing and life-enhancing work should and could be allowed to continue.

Covid, as we know, can attack vital organs. Those with kidney failure are vulnerable to harsher health outcomes if they get covid, and according to data I have been made aware of, a transplant gives better recovery outcomes. I have been told that, in all likelihood, more people in the UK could require kidney transplants post covid, so discarding usable donor kidneys is a shocking waste and a potential scandal. An unintended consequence is that a pause in transplant operations now could lead to a shortage of viable organs in the future. We have a duty to futureproof demand by ensuring that kidney transplants continue now.

Currently, if a viable donor kidney is offered to Belfast, it is routinely refused. It is then offered to one of the other 23 units in Great Britain. If not used there, it is discarded. The Health Secretary needs to spell out the precise numbers of discarded kidneys, hearts, pancreases, livers and lungs across each region of the United Kingdom, and he needs to spell out the percentage increase in discarded organs since 2019. I know that 24 patients have been denied a kidney transplant in Northern Ireland since October 2020. It can only be assumed that the number of denied operations is far greater across the whole of the United Kingdom. Can the Government confirm that number urgently?

Will the Belfast trust and other management bodies in Great Britain now grant the opening of kidney transplant operations? Will they consider using the South West Acute Hospital? Will they agree to use private theatre facilities, if required, to expedite needed procedures? I salute the expert and wonderful work that we have in this field. Untie the hands of these experts and let them get on with this life-saving work. Let us halt this scandal.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The hon. Gentleman asks leave to propose a debate on this specific and important matter of discarded human organs, which he has brought urgently to the House. I have to tell him that Mr Speaker is not satisfied that the matter raised is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24, and therefore will not grant time for a debate, but that does not mean that Mr Speaker has not taken this matter seriously. I am very pleased to see that the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), is on the Treasury Bench and has listened to every word of the hon. Gentleman's application. I am quite sure—the Minister is indicating to me her assent—that she will carefully consider ways in which the matter can be taken forward both in this House and in policy terms. I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this urgent and very disturbing matter to the attention of the House and of the Government.

Point of Order

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you advise me on how best I can use a point of order to thank Sir Simon Wessely for all his work in producing the “Reforming The Mental Health Act” White Paper? Of course, I was not able to get on to the call list, but there are many other people to thank, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), the Secretary of State for Health, and particularly Matilda MacAttram, former director of Black Mental Health UK, who did so much to raise the concerns of the black and African Caribbean community in and around the use of community treatment orders. Is it legitimate to use a point of order to raise this matter, or have I actually abused the point of order process in doing so?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The hon. Gentleman knows the answer to his question. It is not at all legitimate to use an apparent or suggested point of order to make the point that he wishes to make. However, although it is certainly not a matter for the Chair, I acknowledge that he is making the remarks that he has just made in good faith, and wishes to thank the people that he has mentioned. Those people were thanked during the statement by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and I am sure that the whole House agrees with the hon. Gentleman in his non-point of order.

I am now suspending the House very briefly, for two minutes, in order to make the necessary arrangements for the next business.

3.19 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19 Financial Assistance (Gaps in Support)

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

3.21 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Government to undertake an assessment of any gaps in financial support provided to individuals, businesses and industries over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic; to require the Government to report to Parliament on steps it intends to take in connection with any such gaps; and for connected purposes.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to propose this Bill today. It aims to support those who have been excluded or fallen through the gaps of meaningful support during this pandemic. In preparing my speech, I knew I would be following a recent financial statement from the Chancellor, and I had hoped to be responding to some new initiatives to help some of the people who have been without a penny since March 2020. Sadly, I watched the Chancellor once again give a financial statement without even acknowledging or mentioning the excluded. It left me and so many others bewildered, angry and upset. That is why today’s Bill is sadly so necessary. The Government must identify the gaps in support and inform the House of the steps they will take to right this wrong without delay.

Thanks to the vaccination programme, there is light at the end of the tunnel, but right now we are still in the grip of the pandemic. Just yesterday, 1,243 people tragically died from the virus. Schools and non-essential businesses are closed, and we have been told that if we can, we must stay at home. So many have lost their jobs and so many businesses have gone under. For some, the Government have stepped in with a financial safety net, but so many others—our fellow taxpayers—have been abandoned and left to fend for themselves. In the words of Manchester’s Metro Mayor, Andy Burnham:

“Basic fairness demands a solution for those excluded.”

There are many who agree.

During the recall last week, Member after Member from all parts of the House stood up and requested support for those who have been left out. Incredibly, the Prime Minister said in response that nobody had been excluded. I would ask him to listen to some of these examples and tell these people that nobody has been left behind.

Kim is a make-up artist and beauty therapist who has been trading for nine years, operating from a treatment room in her garden and working around her young family. Tragically, Kim lost her husband in 2018 and was then entitled to bereavement allowance. When the pandemic struck, her business had to close. She was denied a local authority grant on the grounds that she operates her business from her garden treatment room. She was deemed ineligible for the self-employment income support scheme because HMRC treats bereavement allowance and the pension payments from her late husband as trade income. She therefore falls foul of the 50:50 rule, where someone must make over 50% of their income from self-employment. Perhaps most cruelly—heartbreakingly—had her partner been alive today, Kim would have

[Tracy Brabin]

received 80% of her business trade profits across the past three years with no questions asked. With two young children to care for, this has caused stress and anxiety. I would like to hear the Prime Minister tell Kim that nobody has been excluded.

Another example comes from a woman I will call Zoe, who contacted me about her sister, Louise, whose business had to close due to coronavirus restrictions. The business opened in May 2019, which meant that Louise was unable to apply for Government support. Her hopes were pinned on obtaining a bounce back loan, which she was denied, despite applying over a six-month period. Louise's family stepped in and tried to help where they could but, traumatically, Louise has attempted to commit suicide three times in recent months. It is heartbreaking to see the effect that the lack of support is having.

James, who was made redundant in 2019, secured a new job in early 2020, only to lose it when covid hit, as the sites he was due to work on were no longer open. He had no employer to furlough him and he was not self-employed, so he fell through the gap. James started 2020 with savings and a new job to look forward to; he tells me that he starts 2021 claiming universal credit and classed as homeless or at risk of homelessness—savings gone, dreams gone, no job, no income from a partner and going through this alone.

James has paid taxes and worked all his life, and contributed to a state pension for years. Would anyone in this House really disagree that he has been excluded? I encourage anyone listening to this today to put themselves in those people's shoes; the sense of injustice that they would feel if they had done the right thing, gone out, worked hard and paid their taxes, only to be abandoned by this Government.

There are millions of citizens reaching out for help only to find that, just by the nature of how their tax is calculated, they are now left by the wayside: the zero-hours worker in the events industry, who cannot get furloughed and is now on universal credit and in debt; the pay-as-you-earn freelancer working in television, who pays tax at source, whose work has now dried up due to the lockdown and whose last employer will not furlough them; the entrepreneurs who took the jump and excitedly became self-employed recently, only to find themselves ineligible for the self-employment income support scheme, and innovators and businesspeople, now desperate and afraid for the future. All those people form the excluded.

A number of distinct groups include 200,000 newly self-employed and 200,000 self-employed people previously earning more than £50,000 in profits, 1.1 million people who earn less than 50% of their income from self-employment, 300,000 new starters, 100,000 people denied furlough, 400,000 PAYE freelancers 700,000 limited company directors and nearly half a million people who have lost out due to maternity, parental or adoption leave—all individuals with the same hopes and dreams as us here in this room. Those groups are distinct, and a number of solutions will be necessary to provide the support that they deserve, but difficulty or complication is absolutely not a satisfactory excuse for disinterest, denial and lack of action.

The Bill I move today calls for the Government to report on the steps they plan to take to rectify the gaps in support, but I would like to assist them by offering

some suggestions that may guide their thinking. While this may sound like a list, each and every suggestion is our trying to find a solution to a human problem and a historic injustice.

First, the newly self-employed could be included in the fourth round of SEISS. Throughout the pandemic, the number of self-employed has been gradually reducing, so it is unlikely the number of claimants would be more than 300,000—a simple and very fair measure. Many directors of small and medium-sized businesses were unable to furlough themselves, either because it would mean that they were not allowed to do any work at all or because they were ineligible. A directors' income support scheme could help to support company directors, which is really important because there will be no meaningful recovery from covid if there are no businesses left standing to employ people.

Many freelancers who have not worked in the last tax year and have received no meaningful financial support have lived on money put aside to pay their tax. With their tax bills now due, perhaps the Treasury could waive tax for those whose income is less than their tax bill. It is also nothing short of an outrage that self-employed mothers have no ability to discount their maternity leave from SEISS payments. That leaves tens of thousands of women discriminated against and out of pocket, and it must be changed and the change backdated without delay.

For those who are employees, access to furlough was entirely in the hands of the employer. Those who have been refused have been left destitute. People are increasingly desperate; only this week I spoke to a man who had just sold his house, saying, "At least we have something left to sell." A one-off taxable grant, while far from comprehensive, could work—a flat payment that would be administratively simple and secure in that, if it pushed them against the income spectrum, the grant could return to the Treasury via the tax system. For the excluded, the Treasury could look at a taxpayer targeted support scheme, which would allow people to claim what they would have received in different circumstances.

These are just many suggestions that could help, but the Treasury must show the political will and instruct its policy experts to find solutions. With the supermarkets returning £2 billion to the Treasury—money already allocated—this could be the ideal time to put those schemes into practice. The coronavirus pandemic has taken so much from us, and the Government have provided unprecedented financial support to millions, which is absolutely to be commended, but the schemes were put in at speed and we now have the bandwidth to attend to the detail and support those left behind.

In drawing my contribution to a close, I pay tribute to the 3 million excluded, who have campaigned and organised in increasingly difficult personal circumstances. No one could have foreseen the pandemic, and people have been left out of meaningful support through no fault of their own. I hope that the Government and the Treasury understand that now is the time to right this historic wrong.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Tracy Brabin, Paula Barker, Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Stephen Farry, Dan Jarvis, Caroline Lucas, John McDonnell, Esther McVey, Mr Virendra Sharma, Jamie Stone, Alison Thewliss and Bill Esterson present the Bill.

Tracy Brabin accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 January, and to be printed (Bill 238).

Financial Services Bill

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 27

MONEY LAUNDERING OFFENCES: ELECTRONIC MONEY INSTITUTIONS, PAYMENT INSTITUTIONS AND DEPOSIT-TAKING BODIES

(1) Part 7 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (money laundering) is amended in accordance with subsections (2) to (6).

(2) In section 327(2C) (conversion or transfer of criminal property: exceptions), after “deposit-taking body” insert “, electronic money institution or payment institution”.

(3) In section 328(5) (arrangements: exceptions), after “deposit-taking body” insert “, electronic money institution or payment institution”.

(4) In section 329(2C) (acquisition, use and possession: exceptions), after “deposit-taking body” insert “, electronic money institution or payment institution”.

(5) In section 339A (threshold amounts)—

(a) in subsection (2), after “deposit-taking body” insert “, electronic money institution or payment institution”,

(b) in subsection (3), in the opening words, after “deposit-taking body” insert “, electronic money institution or payment institution”,

(c) in subsection (3)(a), for “deposit-taking body’s” substitute “body’s or institution’s”,

(d) in subsection (3)(b), for “deposit-taking body” substitute “body or institution”,

(e) in subsection (4), after “deposit-taking body” insert “, electronic money institution or payment institution”, and

(f) in subsection (8)—

(i) after “deposit-taking body” insert “, electronic money institution or payment institution”, and

(ii) after “the body” insert “or institution”.

(6) In section 340 (interpretation)—

(a) in subsection (14)—

(i) omit “or” at the end of paragraph (a), and

(ii) after paragraph (b) insert “, or

(c) a person specified, or of a description specified, in regulations made by the Treasury or the Secretary of State.”,

(b) after subsection (14) insert—

“(14A) In subsection (14)(a)—

(a) the reference to the activity of accepting deposits is a reference to that activity so far as it is, for the time being, a regulated activity for the purposes of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 by virtue of an order under section 22 of that Act, but

(b) the reference to a business which engages in that activity does not include a person specified, or of a description specified, in regulations made by the Treasury or the Secretary of State.

(14B) Before making regulations under subsection (14A)(b), the Treasury or the Secretary of State (as appropriate) must consult such persons likely to be affected by the regulations, or such representatives of such persons, as they consider appropriate.

(14C) ‘Electronic money institution’ has the same meaning as in the Electronic Money Regulations 2011 (S.I. 2011/99) (see regulation 2 of those Regulations).”, and

(c) at the end insert—

“(16) ‘Payment institution’ means an authorised payment institution or a small payment institution (each as defined in regulation 2 of the Payment Services Regulations 2017 (S.I. 2017/752)).”

(7) In section 459 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (orders and regulations)—

(a) in subsection (4), before paragraph (aa), insert—

“(azb) regulations under section 340(14)(c) or (14A)(b),”;

(b) before subsection (6A) insert—

“(6ZC) No regulations may be made by the Treasury or the Secretary of State under section 340(14)(c) or (14A)(b) unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before Parliament and approved by a resolution of each House.”; and

(c) in subsection (6A), before “would” insert “or of regulations under section 340(14)(c) or (14A)(b).”.—
(*John Glen.*)

There are exceptions to certain money laundering offences where the amounts in question fall below a prescribed threshold. The exceptions are currently available for deposit-taking bodies. This new clause extends the exceptions to electronic money institutions and payment institutions and makes changes to the meaning of deposit-taking body.

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.31 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new clause 28—*Forfeiture of money: electronic money institutions and payment institutions.*

New clause 1—*Report into standards of conduct and ethics in the financial services industry—*

“(1) The Treasury must prepare and publish a report into standards of conduct and ethics of businesses regulated or authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority.

(2) The report must include—

(a) an assessment of the prevalence of unlawful practices in the sector, including—

- (i) tax evasion, and
- (ii) money laundering;

(b) an assessment of the prevalence of other practices including—

- (i) the charging of excessive fees,
- (ii) the provision of inadequate advice to customers, and
- (iii) tax avoidance;

(c) consideration of the case for the establishment of a public inquiry into standards of conduct and ethics within the UK financial services industry, under the Inquiries Act 2005; and

(d) an assessment of the present arrangements for the regulation of the financial services sector and the Government’s plans for further reform of the regulatory system.

(3) This report must be laid before Parliament within six months of this Act being passed.”

This new clause would require the Government to publish a report into the standards of conduct and ethics of businesses regulated or authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority, including consideration of the case for the establishment of a public inquiry.

New clause 2—*Report into anticipated use of the Debt Respite Scheme—*

“(1) The Treasury must prepare and publish a report into the anticipated use of the Debt Respite Scheme over the five years following the passing of this Act.

(2) The report must include an assessment of—

(a) the number of people likely to use the Breathing Space scheme

(b) the number of people likely to be offered a Statutory Debt Repayment Plan,

(c) the scale of personal and household debt within the UK economy and the impact of this on use of the Debt Respite Scheme,

(d) the effectiveness of current mechanisms to prevent people having recourse to the Debt Respite Scheme, and

(e) the potential for additional policies and mechanisms to complement the work of the Debt Respite Scheme.

(3) This report must be laid before Parliament within six months of this Act being passed.”

This new clause would require the Treasury to publish a report into the anticipated use of the Debt Respite Scheme, including the effectiveness of the current mechanisms to prevent people having recourse to the Debt Respite Scheme.

New clause 4—*Facilitation of economic crime—*

“(1) A relevant body commits an offence if it—

(a) facilitates an economic crime; or

(b) fails to take the necessary steps to prevent an economic crime from being committed by a person acting in the capacity of the relevant body.

(2) In subsection (1), a ‘relevant body’ is any person, including a body of persons corporate or unincorporated, authorised by or registered with the Financial Conduct Authority.

(3) In subsection (1), an ‘economic crime’ means—

(a) fraud, as defined in the Fraud Act 2006;

(b) false accounting, as defined in the Theft Act 1968; or

(c) an offence under the following sections of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002—

(i) section 327 (concealing etc criminal property);

(ii) section 328 (arrangements etc concerning the acquisition, retention, use or control of criminal property); and

(iii) section 329 (acquisition, use and possession of criminal property).

(4) In subsection (1), ‘facilitates an economic crime’ means—

(a) is knowingly concerned in or takes steps with a view to any of the offences in subsection (3); or

(b) aids, abets, counsels or procures the commission of an offence in subsection (3).

(5) In proceedings for an offence under subsection (1), it is a defence for the relevant body to show that—

(a) it had in place such prevention procedures as it was reasonable in all circumstances for it to have in place;

(b) it was not reasonable in the circumstances to expect it to have any prevention procedures in place.

(6) A relevant body guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable—

(a) on conviction on indictment, to a fine;

(b) on summary conviction in England and Wales, to a fine;

(c) on summary conviction in Scotland or Northern Ireland, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum.

(7) If the offence is proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of—

(a) a director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the relevant body, or

(b) a person who was purporting to act in any such capacity,

this person (as well as the relevant body) is guilty of the offence and liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.”

This new clause would make it an offence for a relevant body authorised or registered by the Financial Conduct Authority to facilitate, or fail to prevent, specified economic crimes.

New clause 6—Money laundering: electronic money institutions—

(1) The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 303Z1 (Application for account freezing order)—

(a) In subsection (1) after “bank” insert “, electronic money institution”

(b) In subsection (6) after “Building Societies Act 1986;” insert—

“‘electronic money institution’ has the same meaning as in the Electronic Money Regulations 2011.”

(3) In section 303Z2 (Restrictions on making of application under section 303Z1), in subsection (3) after “bank” insert “, electronic money institution.”

(4) In section 303Z6 (Restriction on proceedings and remedies), in subsection (1) after “bank” insert “, electronic money institution.”

(5) In section 303Z8 (“The minimum amount”), in subsection (4) after “bank” insert “, electronic money institution.”

(6) In section 303Z9 (“Account forfeiture notice”), in subsection (6)(b) after “bank” insert “, electronic money institution.”

(7) In section 303Z11 (“Lapse of account forfeiture notice”)—

(a) in subsection (6) after “bank” insert “, electronic money institution”

(b) in subsection (7) after “If the bank” insert “, electronic money institution”

(c) in subsection (7) after “on the bank” insert “, electronic money institution.”

(8) In section 303Z14 (“Forfeiture order”), in subsection (7)(a) after “bank” insert “, electronic money institution.”

(9) In section 327 (Concealing etc), after subsection (2C) insert—

“(2D) An electronic money institution that does an act mentioned in paragraph (c) or (d) of subsection (1) does not commit an offence under that subsection if the value of the criminal property concerned is less than the threshold amount determined under section 339A for the act.”

(10) In section 328 (Arrangements), after subsection (5) insert—

“(6) An electronic money institution that does an act mentioned in subsection (1) does not commit an offence under that subsection if the arrangement facilitates the acquisition, retention, use or control of criminal property of a value that is less than the threshold amount determined under section 339A for the act.”

(11) In section 329 (Acquisition, use and possession), after subsection (2C) insert—

“(2D) An electronic money institution that does an act mentioned in subsection (1) does not commit an offence under that subsection if the value of the criminal property concerned is less than the threshold amount determined under section 339A for the act.”

(12) In section 339A (Threshold amounts)—

(a) in subsection (1) leave out “327(2C), 328(5) and 329(2C)” and insert “327(2C), 327(2D), 328(5), 328(6), 329(2C) and 329(2D)”

(b) in subsection (2) after “deposit-taking body” insert “or electronic money institution”

(c) in subsection (3) after “deposit-taking body” insert “or electronic money institution”

(d) in subsection (3)(a) after “deposit-taking body’s” insert “or electronic money institution’s”

(e) in subsection (3)(b) after “deposit-taking body” insert “or electronic money institution”

(f) in subsection (4) after “deposit-taking body” insert “or electronic money institution”

(g) in subsection (8) after “deposit-taking body” insert “or electronic money institution.”

(13) In section 340 (Interpretation), after subsection (14) insert—

“(14A) “Electronic money institution” has the same meaning as in the Electronic Money Regulations 2011.”

This new clause would update definitions in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to reflect the growth of financial technology companies in the UK by equalising the treatment of electronic money institutions with banks in regard to money laundering regulations.

New clause 7—Regulation of buy-now-pay-later firms—

“Within three months of this Act being passed, the Treasury must by statutory regulations make provision for the protection of consumers from unaffordable debt by requiring the FCA to regulate—

(a) buy-now-pay-later credit services, and

(b) other lending services that have non-interest-bearing elements.”

This new clause would bring the non-interest-bearing elements of buy-now-pay-later lending and similar services under the regulatory ambit of the FCA.

New clause 8—European Union regulatory equivalence for UK-based financial services businesses—

“(1) Within three months of this Act being passed, the Treasury must prepare and publish a report on progress towards regulatory equivalence recognition for UK-based financial services firms operating within the European Union.

(2) This report should include—

(a) the status of negotiations towards the recognition of regulatory equivalence for UK financial services firms operating within the European Union;

(b) a statement on areas in where equivalence recognition has been granted to UK based businesses on the same basis as which the UK has granted equivalence recognition to EU based businesses; and

(c) a statement on where such equivalence recognition has not been granted.”

This new clause would require a report to be published on progress towards, or completion of, the equivalence recognition for UK firms which the Government hopes to see following the Chancellor’s statement on EU-based firms operating in the UK.

New clause 9—Debt Respite Scheme: review—

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the impact on debt in parts of the United Kingdom and regions of England of the changes made by section 32 of this Act and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent.

(2) A review under this section must consider the effects of the changes on debt held by—

(a) households,

(b) individuals with protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010,

(c) small companies as defined by the Companies Act 2006.

(3) In this section—

‘parts of the United Kingdom’ means—

(a) England,

(b) Scotland,

(c) Wales, and

(d) Northern Ireland; and

‘regions of England’ has the same meaning as that used by the Office for National Statistics.”

This new clause would require a review of the impact on debt of the changes made to the Financial Guidance and Claims Act 2018 in section 32.

New clause 10—Legal protections for retail clients against the mis-selling of financial services—

“(1) Regulation 3 (Private Person) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Rights of Action) Regulations 2001 is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph 1(a), after “individual”, insert “, partnership or body corporate that is or would be classified as a retail client”.

(3) In paragraph 1(b), leave out “who is not an individual” and insert “not within the definition of paragraph 1(a)”.

(4) For the purposes of this regulation, a “retail client” means a client who is not a professional client within the meaning set out in Annex II of Directive 2014/65/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on markets in financial instruments and amending Directive 2002/92/EC and Directive 2011/61/EU.

This new clause seeks to give retail clients greater legal protections against the mis-selling of financial services products.

New clause 11—Legal protections for small businesses against the mis-selling of financial services—

(1) Regulation 3 (Private Person) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Rights of Action) Regulations 2001 is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph 1(a), leave out “individual” and insert “relevant person”.

(3) In sub-paragraph 1(b), leave out “individual” and insert “relevant person”.

(4) After paragraph 1, insert—

“(1A) For the purposes of this regulation, a ‘relevant person’ means—

- (a) any individual;
- (b) any body corporate which meets the qualifying conditions for a small company under sections 382 and 383 Companies Act 2006 in the financial year in which the cause of action arises;
- (c) any partnership which would, if it were a body corporate, meet the qualifying conditions for a small company under section 382 Companies Act 2006 in the financial year in which the cause of action arises.”

This new clause seeks to give small businesses greater legal protections against the mis-selling of financial services products.

New clause 12—Pre-commencement impact assessment of leaving the EU Customs Union—

(1) No Minister of the Crown or public authority may appoint a day for the commencement of any provision of this Act until a Minister of the Crown has laid before the House of Commons an impact assessment of—

- (a) disapplying EU rules; and
- (b) applying rules different from those of the EU

as a consequence of any provision of this Act.

(2) A review under this section must consider the effects of the changes on—

- (a) business investment,
- (b) employment,
- (c) productivity,
- (d) inflation,
- (e) financial stability, and
- (f) financial liquidity.

(3) A review under this section must consider the effects in the current and each of the subsequent ten financial years.

(4) The review must also estimate whether these effects are likely to have been different in the following scenarios—

- (a) if the UK had left the EU withdrawal transition period without a negotiated comprehensive free trade agreement, or
- (b) if the UK had left the EU withdrawal transition period with a negotiated agreement, and remained in the single market and customs union.

(5) The review must also estimate the effects on the changes if the UK signs a free trade agreement with the United States.

(6) In this section—

- ‘parts of the United Kingdom’ means—
 - (a) England,

- (b) Scotland,
- (c) Wales, and
- (d) Northern Ireland; and

‘regions of England’ has the same meaning as that used by the Office for National Statistics.”

This new clause would require the Government to produce an impact assessment before disapplying EU rules or applying those different to those of the EU; and comparing such with various scenarios of UK-EU relations.

New clause 13—Review of Impact of Scottish National Investment Bank Powers—

(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effect of the use of the powers in this Act in Scotland and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent.

(2) A review under this section must consider the effects of the changes on—

- (a) business investment,
- (b) employment,
- (c) productivity,
- (d) inflation,
- (e) financial stability, and
- (f) financial liquidity.

(3) The review must also estimate the effects on the changes in the event of each of the following—

- (a) the Scottish Government is given no new financial powers with respect to carrying over reserves between financial years,
- (b) the Scottish Government is able to carry over greater reserves between financial years for use by the Scottish National Investment Bank.

(4) The review must under subparagraph 4(b) consider the effect of raising the reserve limit by—

- (a) £100 million,
- (b) £250 million,
- (c) £500 million, and
- (d) £1,000 million.”

This new clause requires a review of the impact of providing Scottish Government powers to allow the SNIB to carry over reserves between financial years beyond its current £100m limit.

New clause 14—Application of money laundering regulations to overseas trustees: review of effect on tax revenues—

(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must review the effects on tax revenues of section 31 and lay a report of that review before the House of Commons within six months of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent.

(2) The review under sub-paragraph (1) must consider—

- (a) the expected change in corporation and income tax paid attributable to the provisions in this Schedule; and
- (b) an estimate of any change attributable to the provisions of section 31 in the difference between the amount of tax required to be paid to the Commissioners and the amount paid.

(3) The review must under subparagraph (2)(b) consider taxes payable by the owners and employees of Scottish Limited Partnerships.”

This new clause would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the effect on public finances, and on reducing the tax gap, of section 31, and in particular on the taxes payable by owners and employees of Scottish Limited Partnerships.

New clause 15—Parliamentary scrutiny of FCA provisions—

“Any provision made by the Financial Conduct Authority under this Act may not be made unless a draft of the provision has been laid before and approved by a resolution of the House of Commons.”

This new clause subjects FCA provisions under this Act to the affirmative scrutiny procedure in the House of Commons.

New clause 16—Scrutiny of FCA Powers by committees—

“(1) No provision may be made by the Financial Conduct Authority under this Act unless the conditions in subsection (2) are satisfied.

(2) The conditions are that—

(a) a new statutory committee comprising Members of the House of Commons has been established to scrutinise financial regulation, and

(b) a new statutory committee comprising Members of the House of Lords has been established to scrutinise financial regulation.

(3) The Treasury must, by regulations, make provision for and about those committees.

(4) Those regulations must provide that the committees have at least as much power as the relevant committees of the European Union.”

This new clause requires statutory financial regulation scrutiny committees to be established before the FCA can make provisions under this Bill.

New clause 17—Review of impact of Act on UK meeting Paris climate change commitments—

“The Chancellor of the Exchequer must conduct an assessment of the impact of this Act on the UK meeting its Paris climate change commitments, and lay it before the House of Commons within six months of the day on which this Act receives Royal Assent.”

This new clause would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the impact of the Bill on the UK meeting its Paris climate change commitments.

New clause 18—Review of impact of Act on UK meeting UN Sustainable Development Goals—

“The Chancellor of the Exchequer must conduct an assessment of the impact of this Act on the UK meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and lay it before the House of Commons within six months of the day on which this Act receives Royal Assent.”

This new clause would require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the impact of the Bill on the UK meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

New clause 19—Money laundering and overseas trustees: review—

“(1) The Treasury must, within six months of this Act being passed, prepare, publish and lay before Parliament a report on the effects on money laundering of the provisions in section 31 of this Act.

(2) The report must address—

(a) the anticipated change to the volume of money laundering attributable to the provisions of section 31; and

(b) alleged money laundering involving overseas trusts by the owners and employees of Scottish Limited Partnerships.”

This new clause would require the Treasury to review the effects on money laundering of the provisions in section 31 of this Act, and in particular on the use of overseas trusts for the purposes of money laundering by owners and employees of Scottish Limited Partnerships.

New clause 20—Regulatory divergence from the EU in financial services: Annual review—

“(1) The Treasury must prepare, publish and lay before Parliament an annual review of the impact of regulatory divergence in financial services from the European Union.

(2) Each annual review must consider the estimated impact of regulatory divergence in financial services in the current financial year, and for the ten subsequent financial years, on the following matters—

- (a) business investment,
- (b) employment,
- (c) productivity,
- (d) inflation,
- (e) financial stability, and
- (f) financial liquidity.

in each English region, and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

(3) Each report must compare the analysis in subsection (2) to an estimate based on the following hypothetical scenarios—

- (a) that the UK leaves the EU withdrawal transition period without a negotiated comprehensive free trade agreement;
- (b) that the UK leaves the EU withdrawal transition period with a negotiated agreement, and remains in the single market and customs union;
- (c) that the UK leaves the EU withdrawal transition period with a negotiated comprehensive free trade agreement, and does not remain in the single market and customs union; and
- (d) that the UK signs a comprehensive free trade agreement with the United States.

(4) The first annual report shall be published no later than 1 July 2021.”

This new clause requires a review of the impact of regulatory divergence from the European Union in financial services, which should make a comparison with various hypothetical trade deal scenarios.

New clause 21—Duty of care specification—

“(1) The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 is amended as follows.

(2) After Section 1C insert—

‘1CA Duty of care specification

(1) In securing an appropriate degree of protection for consumers, the FCA must ensure authorised persons carrying out regulated activities are acting with a duty of care to all consumers.

(2) Matters the FCA should consider when drafting duty of care rules include, but are not limited to—

- (a) the duties of authorised persons to act honestly, fairly and professionally in accordance with the best interest of their consumers;
- (b) the duties of authorised persons to manage conflicts of interest fairly, both between themselves and their clients, and between clients;
- (c) the extent to which the duties of authorised persons entail an ethical commitment not merely compliance with rules;
- (d) that the duties must be owned by senior managers who would be accountable for their individual firm’s approach.”

This new clause would mean that the FCA would need to ensure that financial services providers are acting with a duty of care to act in the best interests of all consumers.

New clause 22—Extension of the Breathing Space and Mental Health Crisis Moratorium—

“(1) The Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space Moratorium and Mental Health Crisis Moratorium) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In section 1(2), for “4th May 2021” substitute “31st January 2021”.

(3) In section 26(2), for “60 days” substitute “12 months”.

This new clause would bring forward the start date of the Debt Respite Scheme and extend the duration of the Breathing Space Moratorium from 60 days to 12 months.

New clause 23—Impact of COVID-19 on the Debt Respite Scheme: Ministerial report—

“(1) The Treasury must prepare and publish a report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Debt Respite Scheme.

(2) The report must include—

- (a) a statement on the extent to which changes to levels of household debt caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the usage and operation of the Debt Respite Scheme;
- (b) a statement on the resilience of UK households to future pandemics and other financial shocks, and how these would affect the usage and operation of the Debt Respite Scheme; and
- (c) consideration of proposals for the incorporation of a no-interest loan scheme into the Debt Respite Scheme for financially vulnerable individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

(3) The report must be laid before Parliament no later than 28 February 2021.”

This new clause would require the Treasury to publish a report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Debt Respite Scheme, including consideration of a proposal for the incorporation of a no-interest loan scheme into the Debt Respite Scheme.

New clause 24—Mortgage contracts: regulation of management and ownership—

“(1) Article 61 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) Order 2001 shall be amended as follows.

(2) After paragraph (2), insert—

“(2A) Managing a regulated mortgage contract is also a specified kind of activity.

(2B) Owning a regulated mortgage contract is also a specified kind of activity.”

(3) For sub-sub-paragraphs (3)(a)(ii) and (3)(a)(iii) substitute—

“(ii) the contract provides for the obligation of the borrower to repay to be secured by a legal mortgage of land (other than timeshare accommodation) in the United Kingdom;

(iii) at least 40% of that land is used, or is intended to be used, as or in connection with a dwelling.”

(4) After sub-paragraph (3)(c), insert—

“(d) ‘managing’ a regulated mortgage contract means having the power to exercise or to control the exercise of any of the rights of a lender under a regulated mortgage contract.

(e) ‘owning’ a regulated mortgage contract means holding the legal title to a regulated mortgage contract or to own beneficially the rights of the lender under a regulated mortgage contract.”

(5) For paragraph (4), substitute—

“(4) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (3)(a)—

(a) ‘mortgage’ includes charge and (in Scotland) a heritable security;

(b) the area of any land which comprises a building or other structure containing two or more storeys is to be taken to be the aggregate of the floor areas of each of those storeys; and

(c) ‘timeshare accommodation’ has the meaning given by section 1 of the Timeshare Act 1992(c).”

This new clause would require the regulation of the ‘management’ and ‘ownership’ of a regulated mortgage contract.

New clause 25—Standard Variable Rates: Cap on charges for Mortgage Prisoners—

“(7) The FCA must make rules by virtue of subsection (1) in relation to introducing a cap on the interest rates charged to mortgage prisoners in relation to regulated mortgage contracts with a view to securing an appropriate degree of protection for consumers.

(8) In subsection (7) ‘mortgage prisoner’ means a consumer who cannot switch to a different lender because of their characteristics and has a regulated mortgage contract with one of the following type of firms—

(a) inactive lenders: firms authorised for mortgage lending that are no longer lending; and

(b) unregulated entities: firms not authorised for mortgage lending.

(9) The rules made by the FCA under subsection (7) must set the level of the cap on the ‘Standard Variable Rate’ at a level no more than 2 percentage points above the Bank of England base rate.

(10) In subsection (9) ‘Standard Variable Rate’ means the variable rate of interest charged under the regulated mortgage contract after the end of any initial introductory deal.

(11) The FCA must ensure any rules that it is required to make as a result of the amendment made by subsection (7) are made not later than 31st July 2021.”

This new clause would require the FCA to introduce a cap on the Standard Variable Rates charged to consumers who cannot switch to a different lender because of their characteristics and who have a regulated mortgage contract with either an inactive lender or an unregulated entity.

New clause 26—Conditions for the transfer of a regulated mortgage contract—

“(1) A regulated mortgage contract shall not be transferred without the written consent of the borrower.

(2) When seeking consent from either an existing or a new borrower the lender must provide a statement to the borrower containing sufficient information in order for them to make an informed decision.

(3) The statement provided pursuant to subsection (2) must be approved in advance by the Financial Conduct Authority and shall include—

(a) a clear explanation of the implications in terms of the interest rates which will be offered to the borrower including details of the policies and procedures which will apply for the setting of mortgage interest rates and for the making of repayments if the transfer takes place;

(b) how the transfer might affect the borrower;

(c) the name and address of the intended transferee, and of any holding company applicable;

(d) the relationship, if any, between the lender and the transferee;

(e) a description of the intended transferee and of its business, including how long it has been in operation, and details of its involvement in the management of mortgages; and

(f) confirmation that in the absence of a specific consent the existing arrangements will continue to apply.

(4) Each borrower shall be approached individually and shall be given a reasonable time within which to give or decline to give their consent.

(5) In this section, ‘regulated mortgage contract’ has the meaning given by article 61(3) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) Order 2001.”

This new clause would require the written consent of the borrower for the transfer of a regulated mortgage contract and require lenders to provide specified information to borrowers when seeking this consent and for this statement to be approved in advance by the FCA.

New clause 30—Offence of facilitation of or failure to prevent financial crime (No. 2)—

“(1) A financial services company commits an offence if it—

(a) facilitates, aids or abets a relevant offence;

(b) does not take all reasonable steps to prevent the commissioning of a relevant offence.

(2) A financial services company guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable—

- (a) on conviction on indictment, to a fine;
- (b) on summary conviction in England and Wales, to a fine;
- (c) on summary conviction in Scotland or Northern Ireland, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum.

(3) For the purposes of this section—

‘financial services company’ means any person, including a body of persons corporate or unincorporated, authorised by or registered with the Financial Conduct Authority’;

‘relevant offence’ means—

- (a) fraud, as defined in the Fraud Act 2006;
- (b) false accounting, as defined in the Theft Act 1968;
- (c) any offence under the following sections of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002;
- (d) tax evasion;
- (e) an offence under Part 7 of the Financial Services Act 2012; and
- (f) insider dealing, as defined in the Criminal Justice Act 1993.”

This new clause would create an offence in cases where financial services companies facilitate or fail to prevent financial crime.

Government amendment 15.

Amendment 13, in clause 33, page 39, line 37, at end insert—

- “(c) the successor account must bear, in each financial year, at least the same level of bonus as the mature account before maturation.”

This amendment would ensure customers do not lose any bonus should their funds be moved from a matured account into a new one.

Amendment 14, in clause 33, page 39, line 37, at end insert—

“(7) Regulations under sub-paragraph (2) may only be made if the conditions in sub-paragraph (8) are met.

(8) The conditions referred to in sub-paragraph (7) are—

- (a) There must be an account available to any affected customer which provides at least as generous a bonus structure as the matured account.
- (b) The customer must have been successfully contacted by a relevant Department or public body.
- (c) The customer must have been given full and accessible information on the effects of changing account.”

This amendment would ensure customers are contacted and informed before their funds are transferred.

Amendment 4, in clause 37, page 44, line 9, at end insert—

“(c) after subparagraph (2) insert—

(2A) A person may not be appointed as chief executive under paragraph 2(2)(b) unless they have the consent of the Treasury Committee of the House of Commons.”

This amendment would require a candidate for the position of chief executive of the FCA to receive the consent of the Treasury Committee for their appointment.

Amendment 3, in clause 37, page 44, line 14, at end insert—

“(2C) A person may not be appointed as chief executive under paragraph 2(2)(b) until the Treasury has prepared and published a report on the effectiveness of the FCA under the tenure of the previous chief executive.”

This amendment would require the Treasury to prepare and publish a report on the effectiveness of the previous chief executive in advance of the appointment of a new chief executive.

Government amendments 16 to 21.

Government new schedule 1—*Forfeiture of money: electronic money institutions and payment institutions.*

Government amendment 22.

Government amendment 23.

Amendment 5, in schedule 2, page 60, line 18, at end insert—

- “(f) impose requirements relating to the publication of quarterly statements on portfolio holdings.”

This amendment would allow the FCA to impose requirements on investment firms to publish quarterly statements on their portfolio holdings.

Amendment 6, in schedule 2, page 60, line 18, at end insert—

“(3A) General rules made for the purpose of subsection (1) must impose requirements relating to the publication of quarterly statements on portfolio holdings.”

This amendment would require the FCA to impose requirements on investment firms to publish quarterly statements on their portfolio holdings.

Government amendments 24 to 26.

Amendment 1, in schedule 2, page 63, line 5, at end insert—

- “(ba) the target for net UK emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 as set out in the Climate Change Act 2008 as amended by the Climate Change Act (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, and”.

Amendment 7, in schedule 2, page 63, line 5, at end insert—

- “(ba) the promotion of ethical investments with reference to the judgements of the International Court of Justice or the High Court of England and Wales concerning genocide under Article II of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and findings of genocide or ethnic cleansing by a United Nations-mandated investigation.”

This amendment would require the FCA, when making Part 9C rules for investment firms, to have regard to findings of genocide by the courts and UN-mandated investigations.

Amendment 8, in schedule 2, page 63, line 5, at end insert—

- “(ba) the likely effect of the rules on trade frictions between the UK and EU, and”.

This amendment would ensure the likely effect of the rules on trade frictions between the UK and EU are considered before Part 9C rules are taken.

Amendment 9, in schedule 2, page 63, line 5, at end insert—

- “(ba) the likely effect of the rules on the UK meeting its international and domestic commitments on tackling climate change, and”.

This amendment would ensure the likely effect of the rules on the UK meeting its international and domestic commitments on tackling climate change are considered before Part 9C rules are taken.

Amendment 10, in schedule 2, page 79, line 25, after “activities” insert

“in the UK and internationally”.

This amendment would ensure the likely effect of the rules on the relative standing of the United Kingdom as a place for internationally active credit institutions and investment firms to be based or to carry on activities are considered both in terms of their UK and international activities before Part CRR rules are taken.

Amendment 2, in schedule 3, page 79, line 29, at end insert—

“(ca) the target for net UK emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 as set out in the Climate Change Act 2008 as amended by the Climate Change Act (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, and”.

Amendment 11, in schedule 3, page 79, line 29, at end insert—

“(ca) the likely effect of the rules on trade frictions between the UK and EU, and”.

This amendment would ensure the likely effect of the rules on trade frictions between the UK and EU are considered before CRR rules are taken.

Amendment 12, in schedule 3, page 79, line 29, at end insert—

“(ca) the likely effect of the rules on the UK meeting its international and domestic commitments on tackling climate change, and”.

This amendment would ensure the likely effect of the rules on the UK meeting its international and domestic commitments on tackling climate change are considered before CRR rules are taken.

Government amendments 27 to 31.

John Glen: Our financial services sector is critical to our national effort to recover from the impacts of covid-19 and move towards a resilient, open and sustainable future for the UK economy. The Bill is the next step in a process to take back control of our financial services legislation, having left the European Union and come to the end of the transition period.

There are a large number of amendments to address, so I will speak at some length, but hopefully as succinctly as possible. Let me start with the 20 new clauses and amendments tabled in my name, which do four things. I will first address new clauses 27 and 28, new schedule 1 and amendments 16 to 20. I hope that the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) will be pleased to see this set of new clauses and amendments, which have been tabled in response to an issue that he raised in Committee.

The Government remain committed to supporting the FinTech sector. The UK is widely considered to be a leading market—probably the leading market—for starting and growing a FinTech firm, and I am proud of that reputation. It has recently become clear that provisions in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 are creating challenges for some types of smaller firms known as e-money institutions and payment institutions. These institutions, which include industry leaders such as Revolut, Worldpay and TransferWise, have experienced significant growth over recent years. Currently, they need to submit a defence against money laundering request—which I shall refer to as a DAML from now on—to the National Crime Agency, to seek consent before proceeding with any transaction involving criminal property, however small.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister give way?

John Glen: I will not on this occasion, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind, because I need to make progress.

In the context that I just outlined, e-money and payment institutions are subject to greater bureaucracy than banks and building societies, which benefit from a £250 threshold amount, under which, in certain circumstances, they do not need to submit a DAML

and can proceed with the transaction. E-money and payment institutions must submit a large number of DAML requests for low-value transactions, which are generally of extremely limited use to law enforcement. Processing these requests consumes law enforcement resource, as well as placing a disproportionate burden on these firms, so the amendment equalises the treatment between banks and payment and e-money institutions.

Alongside this change, new clause 28 amends the scope of account freezing and forfeiture powers in the Proceeds of Crime Act and the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 to include accounts held at payment and e-money institutions. That will ensure that law enforcement are able quickly and effectively to freeze and forfeit the proceeds of crime and terrorist property when held in payment and e-money institution accounts. I hope that, given this, the Opposition will consider withdrawing new clause 6, which has a similar purpose. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his co-operation on this matter.

Jim Shannon: I want to ask this question because it is very important. We have had tremendous difficulties in Northern Ireland with paramilitaries and money laundering. I am just wondering, in the context of the legislation to which the Minister has just referred and money laundering in particular—we have this in my constituency of Strangford and across the whole of Northern Ireland—what discussions has he had with the police and those in the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that loyalist paramilitaries and republican paramilitaries, who are really criminals at the end of the day, are stopped from using that money. Will that be able to be stopped in Northern Ireland if this legislation goes through?

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. It really does stray beyond the provisions of this particular amendment. He makes an important point, but it is not one that I can address at this stage. I would be very happy to write to him to answer his question more appropriately.

I shall now turn to the remaining amendments in my name, which ensure that the powers that the Prudential Regulation Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority have over holding companies function as intended. Amendments 25, 26 and 27 enable the PRA and the FCA to make rules directly over holding companies to void employment contracts and require recovery of remuneration paid to individuals when rules prohibiting them from being paid in a certain way are breached. This is important because, as a result of the measures brought forward in this Bill, responsibility for ensuring compliance with a banking or investment group’s capital requirements is moving from its operating companies to its holding company. The amendments ensure that the regulator can deal with breaches of the rules at the level at which they are set.

Amendments 15, 28, 29, 30 and 31 are a set of relatively small amendments that ensure that the PRA has the full suite of enforcement tools at its disposal for the supervisory regime over holding companies. Amendment 24 is a technical drafting point. Amendments 22 and 23 are clarificatory amendments, which are necessary to ensure that the investment firm’s prudential regime applies to the correct set of firms and does not have extraterritorial effect. I know that this is an important

point for my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami). I thank him for his work on this and hope that he will welcome these amendments.

I shall now turn to the other amendments that have been tabled by Members of this House. First, there are a number of amendments that relate to criminality and money laundering. New clause 4 and new clause 30 would create a new criminal offence for FCA-regulated persons of facilitating and of failing to prevent economic crime. This is an important and complex topic, so I will seek to address it in detail.

The Government have taken significant action to improve corporate governance and culture in the financial services industry. We introduced the new senior managers and certification regime, which enables the FCA more easily to take action against the responsible senior manager where there has been a failure in a firm's financial crime systems and controls. Separately, the Government have recently strengthened the anti-money laundering requirements on financial services firms.

In 2017, the Government issued a call for evidence on whether corporate liability law for economic crime needed to be reformed. Unfortunately, the findings were inconclusive and, as a result, the Government have tasked the Law Commission to conduct an expert review on this issue to report by the end of this year. That will ensure a more comprehensive understanding of any issues with current economic crime law, as well as the implications of any potential options if reform is considered necessary. Before any broader new "failure to prevent" defence for economic crime is introduced, there needs to be strong evidence to support it, as there was when similar bribery and tax evasion offences introduced in 2010 and 2017 respectively took place. A new offence will also need to be designed rigorously, with specific consideration given to how it sits alongside associated criminal and regulatory regimes and to the potential impacts on business.

The proposed new offences in this amendment would lead to a discrepancy in treatment between FCA-regulated businesses and other businesses under criminal law. The 2017 call for evidence did not provide any evidence to suggest financial services businesses should be specifically targeted with a new offence. Indeed, many of the examples provided related to businesses in other sectors.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): In terms of the corporate offence of failing to prevent economic crime, the Minister asked for evidence on that, but there is a wealth of evidence that the FCA is not holding either corporations or individuals to account for some egregious behaviour, particularly in the banking system and many other parts of corporate life. We are seeing fraud, but £9 billion of fines in the US in a 10-year period and only £260 million in the UK. Is that not proof alone that we need legislation in this area?

John Glen: It is easy to point to headline differences in rates of fines, but it is quite different to intervene with a new piece of legislation that is fit for purpose. That is why I am absolutely clear that the call for evidence this year will gather that evidence—I am sure that my hon. Friend will be keen to submit his evidence to that—and, in due course, we will look at it and examine what the implications are. However, I am not suggesting from the Dispatch Box that everything is perfect with respect to regulation, and of course, there are regulatory failures

from time to time and criminal activity. The question is what the most appropriate legislative response is.

I turn to new clause 14, which would add a requirement for the Government to report on the effect of clause 31 on tax revenues. This does not reflect the effect of the provision that we have included in the Bill. The Bill provision merely ensures the continuation of, and the ability to vary in future, the original powers assigned to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs with respect to registration of overseas trusts. It does not make any change to taxes.

Similarly, it is not necessary to introduce a report on the impact on money laundering of clause 31, as proposed by new clause 19. Existing legislation already requires the Treasury to carry out a review of its existing provisions within money-laundering regulations and publish a report setting out the conclusions of its review by June 2022. This wider review will provide a more meaningful evaluation than the one envisaged in the amendment.

Amendment 7 raises a very important issue. This amendment would require the FCA to "have regard" to the promotion of ethical investments with reference to findings of genocide by the High Court and the International Court of Justice when making rules for the investment firm prudential regime. While I am extremely sympathetic to the issue raised by Members on both sides of the House, including the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), this Bill is not the right place to address the issue. This amendment would require the FCA to make political choices about whether to associate itself and its rules with countries that are guilty of genocide or ethnic cleansing. These important decisions on UK foreign policy are for Government to take and not an independent financial services regulator.

I will now address a number of amendments that seek to bring new activities—

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

John Glen: I am very happy to—I thought I might provoke an intervention from my right hon. Friend.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I am glad the Minister gave me time to get this awful mask off.

I understand fully my hon. Friend's arguments, and I will come to that in a second when I have an opportunity to catch Madam Deputy Speaker's eye, but on the point he is making, I simply ask him this question: can he conceive that any UK Government would ever authorise trade arrangements on a special basis with any country guilty of genocide?

John Glen: My right hon. Friend has raised this matter in the context of having raised it in a number of other regards with respect to the Trade Bill, and it would obviously be appropriate for my ministerial colleagues in that Department to address it in that context. Today, it is my responsibility to deal with it in the context of financial services regulation, as I think I have done, but I do not want to deny the grave significance of the matter that he is raising, and indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) has raised it with me, too. Obviously, these are complex matters on which others will respond in due course.

[John Glen]

I will now address a number of amendments that seek to bring new activities into FCA regulation. New clause 7 relates to “buy now, pay later” products and would require the Treasury to bring those products and other interest-free credit products into the scope of financial services regulation. Those products can play an important role by providing a lower-cost alternative for people making purchases, especially larger items. As an interest-free credit product, “buy now, pay later” is inherently lower-risk than other forms of borrowing, and can be a useful part of the toolkit for managing personal finances and tackling financial exclusion.

3.45 pm

However, I am very aware of the potential risks, particularly in relation to consumers’ taking on unsustainable levels of debt. A delayed payment on an occasional basis for someone who has the means to make those repayments is different from accumulating unsustainable levels of debt, which cause that individual to seek additional financing from high-cost lending. I recognise that the conflation of those two activities is the motivation. The former interim CEO of the FCA, Chris Woolard, is undertaking a review into change and innovation in the unsecured credit market—specifically, the emergence of “buy now, pay later” products, which I recognise have grown considerably in recent months. Mr Woolard is due to publish his findings shortly, and I stand ready to take swift and proportionate action following the conclusion of the review, reflecting carefully on what he says. I have worked closely with him over the past three years when he has made interventions in his previous role, and I will address his report and engage with the industry and interested parties at that point.

I now turn to new clauses 24 to 26. I have a great deal of sympathy for borrowers who are unable to switch their mortgage deal and I am committed to finding practical ways to help. Progress has been made over recent months. This is an important topic and I will respond in a little detail. I am afraid that the new clauses risk a number of unintended consequences. It would be disproportionate to support a small number of borrowers, as it would be likely to have an impact across the whole of the mortgage market and in the worst case could damage financial stability.

On new clause 24, the benefit to borrowers of extending the FCA’s regulatory perimeter is likely to be minimal. The vast majority of firms that manage the key mortgage activities, such as rate setting, are already FCA-regulated. Furthermore, where those are separate organisations, the beneficial owners, the ultimate economic owners, do not manage relevant activities. Therefore, extending the FCA’s oversight to ownership would also have little material impact on consumer outcomes.

This is a live matter for discussion with the FCA. If I believe that there is a meaningful additional value from that premature extension, I will look at that sympathetically, but that is not my judgment at this point. We are yet to see evidence that the challenges that borrowers are facing would be remedied by extending the FCA’s remit. It is important to emphasise that extending the perimeter would not allow consumers to access new deals or cheaper rates that they could not access already. The new clause seeks to extend the FCA’s remit not only to more firms that engage in mortgage lending, but also to

the type of mortgages that are regulated. That would bring into regulated scope lending such as buy-to-let mortgages and would fundamentally reshape the regulation of the mortgage market in the UK.

New clause 25 seeks to cap the interest rates paid by mortgage prisoners. Data from the FCA suggests that a narrow majority of borrowers with inactive lenders pay less than 3.5% interest. Compared with those with similar lending characteristics, consumers with inactive lenders pay only marginally more—about 0.4 %—than those with an active lender. Capping standard variable rates on mortgages with inactive lenders would represent a significant intervention into the market, potentially having an impact on financial stability, as it would restrict lenders’ ability to vary prices in line with market conditions. I believe that such an intervention would be disproportionate, and potentially counterproductive.

Kevin Hollinrake: Yesterday I was looking at a document written by a former lead analyst in that very market—someone who used to work for PIMCO. He very clearly sets out that the proposed change would have a transformational effect on tens of thousands of mortgage prisoners who will not be helped by any other measure that could be put in place. He says quite clearly:

“Introducing an SVR cap on closed, non-lending books would not disrupt the residential mortgage-backed security market”.

That is a direct contradiction of my hon. Friend’s position.

John Glen: Indeed, Martin Lewis, who does some excellent work in this regard and whom I met on this topic recently, looked at this very matter—he commissioned some work from the London School of Economics to look into it—and recommended that we should not take this cap on the SVR. There will always be a variety of views, but I have set out very clearly why I think this is the right position.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The Minister is full of reasons, as Treasury Ministers always are, for not accepting amendments or new clauses that people have tabled to solve problems. Does he appreciate the frustration that mortgage prisoners and those who are trying to do something about financial crime feel when they hear Ministers giving us all the technical reasons why things cannot be done but not really proceeding with much alacrity to solve the problems that we raise, albeit not necessarily in the correct format?

John Glen: I am very happy to respond to that. That is why, over the last three years, I have engaged with the problem and worked with the FCA to change the lending criteria so that an estimated 125,000 of the 250,000 mortgage prisoners have been able to switch to more affordable mortgages if they are not taking on lending and are not in arrears. This is a complex problem. I am still focused on the 55,000 that we estimate are in that difficult position. I will continue to work with stakeholders and industry representatives to find solutions, working closely with the FCA, but that does not permit me simply to allow any intervention. I did start my remarks with a concession on something that I thought was constructive.

Let me move on to new clause 26, which would require a lender to seek a borrower’s permission before transferring their loan. That would give rise to significant

financial stability concerns, especially if a firm was entering liquidation, since it would prevent the timely transfer of the mortgage book. Selling a mortgage book can also represent a sensible way for a lender to manage its balance sheet and does not change the terms or conditions of a borrower's mortgage contract.

I turn to a number of amendments relating to EU exit and financial services. New clause 12 would require the Treasury to assess the impact of adopting different rules from those of the EU through the Bill. It is right that the UK is able to adopt rules that best suit our own markets. The Government have published an impact assessment alongside the Bill, so the new clause is unnecessary.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): There is one overseas territory that is intimately connected to the EU: Gibraltar, which values its financial independence. I would just like to use this opportunity—I am sure the Minister will not mind commenting—to reassure the people of Gibraltar that their financial services are absolutely safe under this Government and this Bill.

John Glen: I am very happy to do that. Indeed, the Bill makes provision to ensure that there is ongoing certainty for financial services—particularly the insurance industry, which is so significant to the Gibraltar economy.

New clause 20 would require the Government to review the cost of divergence from EU rules. I just do not accept that characterisation. Regulatory regimes are not static. There are a lot of myths around this area of divergence. Rules evolve all the time. Where we make changes to our frameworks as they stand today, those will be guided by our continued commitment to the highest international standards and by what is right for the UK's complex and highly developed markets, to support our world-class environment for doing business. The Bill is the first part of that journey.

New clause 8 would require the Government essentially to report on the status of the EU's considerations about UK equivalence. That is an autonomous process for the EU, and therefore that is not something that the Government can agree to do. The Chancellor recently announced a package of equivalence decisions—17 decisions out of the 30 that we had to make for the EU—and I will keep the House updated on the UK's approach to equivalence, just as I did throughout the transition period.

I turn to new clauses 15 and 16, and amendments 3 and 4, which relate to how the regulators' actions under the Bill will be scrutinised by Parliament. The UK's regulators are internationally renowned as leaders in financial services regulation, and the Government believe that it is right that powers to implement often highly complex rules are delegated to the bodies with the appropriate technical expertise.

The FCA is already accountable to the Treasury, Parliament and the public. There is a statutory requirement for the FCA's annual report and accounts for the financial year to be laid before Parliament by the Treasury, and a requirement to hold an annual public meeting at which the annual report can be discussed. There is currently nothing preventing a Select Committee of either House from reviewing the activities of the FCA at an inquiry, taking evidence, calling witnesses and reporting with

recommendations. The Treasury recently published a consultation document on the review into the future regulatory framework for financial services, which seeks to achieve the right split of responsibilities between Parliament, Government and the regulators, now that we have left the EU. That is a significant undertaking that we must get right, and I look forward to continuing to engage with Members as part of that review.

I have spoken at length about a number of topics that are not directly addressed in the Bill. I will now address amendments relating to some of the measures that make up the Bill itself. I have already said that the prudential measures contain an accountability framework, and I will begin by addressing a number of amendments that seek to add additional elements to that framework. As I said to the Public Bill Committee, amendments 1 and 2, along with amendments 9 and 12, all add considerations relating to climate change to the accountability framework. They are not necessary, as the Bill grants the Treasury a power to specify further matters relating to the accountability framework at a later date. I can assure Members across the House that the Treasury will carefully consider adding climate change as an issue to which the regulator should have regard, in the future. However, any such addition needs careful consideration and consultation on how it can be best framed. Therefore, the Government cannot support these amendments.

Amendments 8 and 11 would require the FCA and the PRA to have regard to the impact of their prudential rules on frictionless trade with the EU. Similarly, amendment 10 would require the PRA to have regard to the UK's relative standing when making rules on capital requirements. These amendments are unnecessary. The accountability framework introduced by the Bill already requires the regulators to consider the impact of their rules on financial services equivalence. That is the main mechanism for financial services relationships between the UK and all overseas jurisdictions, not only the EU, and the Bill already requires the PRA to consider the UK's standing in relation to other countries and territories.

Amendments 13 and 14 relate to the Help to Save scheme. We expect the majority of account holders to make an active decision about where they want to transfer their money where their accounts mature. However, I recognise that some individuals will become disengaged from their accounts, and before I turn to the specific amendments, I want to update the House on the Government's plans for supporting these disengaged customers.

Successor accounts, which are enabled by Clause 33, are one of the options that have been under consideration. Having carefully assessed the options, the Government have decided not to use the power provided by this clause at this point. This is primarily because of the operational issues, which mean that we would not be able to guarantee that every customer would be able to have a successor account opened for them automatically. I was therefore unable to conclude that this approach represented value for money. Instead, the Government propose to support customers who do not provide specific instructions for the transfer of their money, by ensuring that they receive their funds into their nominated bank account—the account into which they already receive their bonus payments. If the bonus payments are paid into that account, the principal amount will revert to that account. This will ensure that disengaged customers will be reunited with their savings and bonus payments.

[John Glen]

Amendments 13 and 14 would, in effect, extend the four-year term of the Help to Save scheme by providing a guaranteed bonus for the successor account. The aim of Help to Save is to kick-start a regular long-term savings habit and encourage people to continue to save via mainstream savings accounts. The Government's view is that a four-year Help to Save period is sufficient to achieve this objective. Amendment 14 also seeks to mandate the contacting of customers regarding the transfer of balances to a successor account. This amendment is unnecessary, as all customers will be contacted ahead of their accounts maturing, to encourage them to engage with their accounts and to provide instructions on where to transfer their funds.

New clause 2 would require the Treasury to publish a report on the anticipated use of the debt respite scheme. The expected demand and take-up of both elements of the debt respite scheme have been quantified to the extent possible at this stage and published in the appropriate impact assessments. I share right hon. and hon. Members' determination that these schemes should work for those who need them. The Government will of course closely monitor both schemes' usage and consider the impacts of covid-19 and the wider economic recovery on them.

I am afraid that producing a report within six months evaluating the impact of changes made by clause 32 on levels of debt across the UK, as proposed by new clause 9, is not possible, as the regulations establishing a statutory debt repayment plan are unlikely to have been made and implemented by that point. I can assure Members that the Government are committed to properly evaluating both the statutory debt repayment plan and the breathing space after their commencement.

4 pm

New clause 22, standing in the name of the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), would require the breathing space scheme to commence on 31 January 2021 instead of 4 May 2021, and that is less than three weeks away. The IT system that will administer the scheme, as well as creditors and debt advisers who will implement the scheme, will unfortunately not be ready by then. I am pleased to inform the House that the breathing space guidance was published on 24 December 2020. Creditors and debt advisers will also need time to understand the guidance in order to implement the scheme in just a short period between now and 4 May 2021.

The amendment would also extend the duration of a breathing space moratorium from 60 days to 12 months. I can reassure Members that the breathing space scheme has been subject to extensive consultation, and 60 days balances the interests of a debtor and the rights of creditors, and is longer than the six weeks originally committed to in the 2017 manifesto.

I am afraid that the report on the impact of covid-19 on implementation of the new debt respite scheme proposed by new clause 23 is not feasible by the suggested date of 28 February. The Government have already quantified expected demand and usage of both breathing space and the statutory debt repayment plan in the appropriate impact assessments, and will of course closely monitor those after the schemes commence.

I conclude by addressing a number of small, separate amendments. New clauses 17 and 18 would require the Government to report to Parliament on the impact of

the Bill on meeting our international obligations under the Paris agreement and the UN sustainable development goals. The Government are committed to meeting those goals and believe that doing so will require effort from all sectors of the economy. That includes the need for strong commitment from the financial services sector to continue developing into an open, green and technologically advanced industry, serving the communities and citizens of this country. Green finance will be integral to the future of financial services legislation in the UK, and our international commitments will be considered extensively. However, as the Bill is part of a much wider process, it would not be appropriate to review its impact on our international obligations in isolation.

I do not believe that new clause 1, which seeks to require the Treasury to publish a report on the standards of conduct and ethics in FCA regulated or authorised firms, is necessary either. The FCA supervises, monitors and investigates authorised firms and individuals to ensure that the relevant principles and rules are being met. It also has wide-ranging powers to investigate potential rule breaches and is further required to have regard to the principle that it should exercise its functions as transparently as possible.

New clauses 10 and 11 relate to the mis-selling of financial services. The Government have given the FCA a strong mandate to stop inappropriate behaviour in financial services, using a wide range of enforcement powers—criminal, civil and regulatory—to protect consumers and businesses alike. Following the expansion of the remit of the Financial Ombudsman Service in April 2019, 97% of small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK can now put forward a complaint.

New clause 13 relates to the Scottish National Investment Bank. We have already agreed significant financial flexibilities with the Scottish Government as part of the Scotland Act 2016 and their fiscal framework, including a £700 million reserve. The Scottish Government can manage the Scottish National Investment Bank through these existing arrangements if they choose to prioritise it.

I know that a number of Members have strong views on a proposed statutory "duty of care" for the FCA. As the FCA is already taking steps to ensure that financial services firms exercise due care and regard when offering products, services and advice, a statutory duty of care, as proposed by new clause 21, is not necessary. I am afraid that I do not see the case for amendments 5 and 6, which respectively seek to provide a power for and to impose a duty on the FCA to require investment firms to publish quarterly statements on portfolio holdings. The FCA already has the ability to impose public disclosure requirements on FCA investment firms under its general rule-making powers. The content and frequency of any disclosure requirements should be determined by the expert regulator, and the FCA is best placed to determine that level of detail.

I look forward to another session of robust and informed debate, and I hope that I have provided the House with clear and reasonable explanations for the Government's position on the amendments before us today. Thank you for your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before I call the shadow Minister, I should say that we have until 6 o'clock for this debate and a number of colleagues want to get in. I have introduced a five-minute

time limit to start with, to try to accommodate some of the main people behind other amendments, but it is very likely that I will quickly have to take that down afterwards; I just warn colleagues that that may well happen.

I remind hon. Members that when a speaking limit is in effect for Back Benchers, a countdown clock will be visible on the screens of hon. Members participating virtually. For hon. Members participating physically in the Chamber, the usual clock in the Chamber will operate.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, may I wish you, the Minister and the House a happy new year?

The Bill returns to the House at a very important moment for the country's economy and our financial services industry. We have just come to the end of the transition period with the European Union, and we are of course in the teeth of the battle against the virus. Against a background like that, the business of legislating can seem even more prosaic than usual, and perhaps that is even more the case with a Bill such as this one. It is a mixed bag of measures dealing with everything from onshoring various EU directives to the length of the term of office for the chief executive of the Financial Conduct Authority. Some of it is a necessary consequence of our withdrawal from the European Union, and other parts look as though they have been sitting in the Treasury waiting for a legislative home, like policies hoping for a passing bus.

I want to focus on the amendments tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and then turn to some of those tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends. The first amendment I want to speak to is our amendment 1 on the UK's net zero commitments. The Bill sets out, in schedules 2 and 3, a list of things that the regulators have to have regard to in the exercise of their new and expanded functions under the Bill. It talks of international standards and competitiveness, yet nowhere is there a mention of the overarching goal that will shape so much of our economy in the decades to come.

In this place, we have rows and arguments about all manner of issues, but sometimes the things that generate the most heat, if the Minister will pardon me the pun, are not always the biggest or most important issues. Conversely, just because an issue has bipartisan support does not make it less significant, and there is no doubt that the Climate Change Act 2008, as amended by the Climate Change Act (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, is one of the most significant pieces of economic legislation to pass in this country for many years.

To achieve our net zero goals will require wholesale change in many walks of life. The briefest of looks at the Committee on Climate Change's report on how this should be done shows what the main areas will be. On energy, we need to find replacements for fossil fuels, we have to invest in the shift to hydrogen and we are still trying to make carbon capture and storage a practical reality. On transport, the transition to battery power will have to proceed at an ever-increasing pace. On housing, we need not only to build new zero-carbon homes, but to retrofit millions of existing homes with zero-carbon heating systems. Agriculture, food production and even the clothes we wear—all these things will undergo big change, and all of them will require significant financial investment.

The UK financial services sector has a huge role to play. In seeking a post-Brexit role, what better long-term mission could there be than empowering the change that we need to make to preserve the planet for future generations? This is not just my view—the Chancellor himself has said as much. In his statement on the future of financial services, given two months ago from the Government Dispatch Box, he not only announced the first green gilts, but said he wanted to see

“the full weight of...capital behind the critical global effort to tackle climate change”.—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2020; Vol. 683, c. 621.]

Yet this Bill, which empowers the regulators in so many other ways, is totally silent on that issue. The Minister says we might do it in the future. [*Interruption.*] He says from a sedentary position that we will do it in the future. He has an opportunity to do it today—he could just accept the amendment. What is the point of waiting until the future to do this, as he has indicated he will, when there is an amendment that does not seek to add any new commitments but simply seeks to make this part of the remit of our financial services regulators?

There are many reasons, as my newly ennobled—if that is the correct word; newly honoured, perhaps—hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle) said, to say no to amendments, but “not invented here” is one of the worst if the Government have indicated they are going to accept an amendment.

The Government say they want the UK to be the centre for green finance globally, but their first legislative outing on this sector since we left the European Union says nothing about mandating the regulators of the industry to make that part of their mission. As I said, our amendment does not seek to add to the commitments on net zero that the UK has already made, which are already set out in legislation and enjoy the support of all sides of the House, but to make these part of the remit of the regulators that shape our financial services industry. There is already a move towards greater environmental investing from investment funds and from consumers who want to invest in this way, and there is a desire for these products, so why do the Government not back that up by making it part of the regulators' remit?

We know that these commitments cannot be met without large-scale investment. To anyone who says to just leave it to the market if there is an investor desire, we also know that it cannot be done by the private sector alone. This will take both the private sector and the public sector working together and pulling in the same direction. It is in that spirit that we put forward the amendment. We ask for something that has bipartisan support, is in line with the post-Brexit goal for the sector as set out by the Chancellor himself and will make it easier for the country to achieve its commitments.

Further to that, we are asking for something that the Minister said in recent minutes that the Government would do at some point anyway. We very much hope that, between now and six o'clock, the Government will reconsider and accept the amendment, which they have said they agree with and will bring forward in some way themselves at some point.

Just two weeks ago, the House approved the post-Brexit trade and co-operation agreement, but for financial services this is basically a no-deal agreement. The references within it do no more than repeat standard pledges of

[Mr Pat McFadden]

co-operation in every free trade agreement. The Prime Minister himself acknowledged that, for this sector, he did not achieve as much as he hoped. Indeed, within a few days of the agreement, £6 billion-worth of euro-denominated share trading shifted from London to European exchanges—an immediate response to the new situation.

Dame Angela Eagle: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the way the Government approached the Brexit negotiation means that there is literally no incentive for the EU to agree equivalence arrangements, because the lack of them means exactly what he just pointed out—jobs and trading formerly done in London migrating to the EU? Does he also agree that, in this new environment, any move by the Government to give the City a competitive edge is likely to lessen the chances of progress on equivalence in the EU, and the market access that comes with it? That is another threat to jobs in the City and to tax revenue for the Exchequer.

Mr McFadden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that this throws into sharp relief the claim that we hold all the cards. It also throws into sharp relief the debate about divergence, as that remains undecided. The fact that the agreement approved by this House two weeks ago did not cover financial services in any meaningful way was not an accident; it was a choice that the Government made. Step by step, the Government abandoned any attempt to prioritise the market access that the financial services sector, and indeed services in general, had until the end of last year. I remind Conservative Members of the Chequers paper published in 2018, of which they may have more or less fond memories. It acknowledged that on this issue,

“there will be more barriers to the UK’s access to the EU market” than there are today. On equivalence regimes, it said:

“These regimes are not sufficient to deal with a third country whose financial markets are as deeply interconnected with the EU’s as those of the UK are. In particular, the existing regimes”—that is, the equivalence regimes—

“do not provide for...institutional dialogue...a mediated solution where equivalence is threatened by a divergence of rules or supervisory practices”.

That which was deemed insufficient by the Government two and a half years ago has now become the height of their ambitions, and even that has not yet been achieved. With each step back from what they aimed for before, the incentives to shift funds and people become bigger.

4.15 pm

A few days ago, the Chancellor talked in an interview about a big bang 2.0 for the financial services sector. Would it not be better to secure the basics—a minimal level of market access—rather than indulging in another bout of meaningless overclaim? There is a potential route to saving something, because the agreement calls for a memorandum of understanding on financial services to be agreed by the end of March. Can the Minister confirm that it is the Government’s objective to secure equivalence recognition by the end of that three-month period?

That is what our new clause 8 calls for: a report on the progress within the timescale set out in the agreement approved by the House a couple of weeks ago. Achieving

such equivalence would be a far lower and more precarious level of market access than the sector has enjoyed until now, but it would be more than the no-deal outcome that the Government have given it at the moment. Will the Minister commit to reporting to the House on the progress of that issue? Without progress, the sector has no clarity about the basis on which it will trade with the European Union in the future.

We do not need to move new clause 6. The Minister is correct to say that we raised the issue of FinTechs and money laundering in Committee, where an amendment was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare). The new clause seeks to equalise the rules on seizure of assets and the proceeds of crime for FinTechs and traditional financial institutions. I am grateful to the Minister for responding positively to our plea about that issue and for bringing forward new clause 27 and the associated amendments.

I now turn to some of the other issues on the amendment paper. We support the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) in new clause 7 to bring the operations of the buy now, pay later sector under the auspices of the FCA. That is a good example of how regulation has to respond to innovation; the Minister rightly said that it cannot stand still. This is a sector that innovates, and the emergence of the sector is an innovation, at least on the scale on which it is currently operating, and it has been growing over the past year. Much of the sector does not charge interest or fees, but the model is based on encouraging people to buy more. There are certainly financial penalties for borrowers who get into more debt than they can handle or who find themselves unable to make the payments.

To those companies that have taken the approach of St Augustine—“Make me just, Lord, but not yet!”—and have said that they favour regulation, but not now, which is a bit like the Minister with net zero, I would say, look again at the terms of new clause 7. All it calls for is the protection of consumers from unaffordable debt. Exactly how to regulate and do that is left to the FCA to decide. The new clause simply establishes the principle, which we support.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) have tabled amendments on the failure to prevent economic crime. We received strong representations on this issue in written evidence, and the problem is focused in this way: when wrongdoing happens within a company, far too often it is in the interest of directors and senior managers to plead ignorance. That way, if anyone carries the can at all, it will be someone further down the line, and the culture and the circumstances that allowed the economic crime to happen go unexamined.

That happened time after time during the LIBOR scandal a few years ago. I had the task, maybe the pleasure, of serving on the cross-party parliamentary inquiry, and chief executive after chief executive of major financial institutions came into this building to express their incredulity at what their own traders were up to. These were some of the highest-paid people in the world, and each one testified that they learned what was happening in their own company only when they read about it in the newspapers. It worked for them, and there were no corporate prosecutions for this in the UK.

The amendments essentially seek to remove the defence of ignorance when it comes to corporate crime. The truth is that we have already legislated to remove that defence in other areas. Such a defence would be regarded as completely bogus and illegitimate when it comes, for example, to tax evasion or bribery. We would not let directors and senior managers plead ignorance in those circumstances.

Kevin Hollinrake: The right hon. Gentleman is speaking to an important amendment that not only allows for corporate prosecution but allows for a person who is registered with the FCA to be prosecuted. Is that not a critical point? Unless we start holding individuals to account for these wrongdoings, we will never stamp out these corporate failures and this corporate abuse.

Mr McFadden: The hon. Gentleman makes a very strong point, and it is why we believe these are strong amendments. We should do this because it is right in itself, and it is an important signal to send about financial services in this post-Brexit world. We do not want to send a signal that we are going for relative weakness in anti-fraud and anti-money laundering laws. Instead, the signal should be that we insist on the strongest possible measures.

New clause 21 seeks to establish a duty of care. This is a long-running debate, and we tabled a similar amendment in Committee. The new clause is intended to make companies ask not just whether their products are legal, but whether they are right and are in the consumer's interest.

New clauses 25 and 26 seek to address the plight of mortgage prisoners. These are people who are stuck on very high standard variable rates and have no ability to switch. All I would ask is, if the Minister cannot accept these amendments, will he continue to work on this issue to try to help these people who are trapped, through no fault of their own, on very uncompetitive rates? He mentioned 3% or 4%, which is much higher than is available in a mortgage environment where the base rate is 0.1%. That can mean paying thousands of pounds more per year, depending on the size of the mortgage, so this is a real material difference for people.

We have a global financial sector in this country that, if properly regulated and paying its way, is a huge asset to the people of this country. We want it to be innovative and successful, but we also want to ensure the public are properly protected against risks if things go wrong. That is the spirit in which we tabled these amendments, and it is the spirit in which we have approached the Bill throughout. I hope the Minister will consider that when it comes to the votes in a couple of hours' time.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I rise to support amendment 7, in the name of the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), myself and 41 other Members. The Minister knows well, because we have had this discussion before—just in case it was to be private, I want to make it public, not because I do not trust him, but I just think it is helpful for him to know that—that the amendment seeks to bind or hold those involved in financial trade and investment to a definition of who they should not trade with and why. To that extent, it introduces the concept of a genocide definition. This measure is also in

the Trade Bill, which is coming back to the House, and I make no apology for supporting the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow in this. She will speak later, but as I understand it, she may not move the amendment. However, that is not the point. The point is that it is time to air this argument.

For too long, we have allowed ourselves to walk away from the issue of genocide without ever managing to hold any country guilty of this. Successive Governments have found it impossible to act because these issues are apparently referred to the International Criminal Court. The Government say to me, "It's a matter for the international courts," but they know full well that any reference to the ICC has to come from the Security Council, and it will never come from the Security Council because at least two of the nations there will always block it, particularly if it is to do with them or their allies. That is a distinct weakness, and I refer, of course, to the Chinese Communist party and Russia.

Let me give a couple of examples. We have discussed many times—the Foreign Secretary made a statement on it this week—the fact that many companies invest in, take trade from and take goods from areas of the world that are using slave labour. We know that this is happening in many places. For example, what is happening to the Rohingya is, in my view, likely to be defined as genocide. We can also look at what is happening to the Uyghurs in China. It is becoming more and more apparent every day that between 1 million and 3 million Uyghurs have been moved into labour camps. They are used as slave labour. They face forced sterilisation. There has been an 85% drop in their birth rate in that area. They have been moved out of their original area of work, and they are no longer allowed to speak their own language.

That is just one aspect, but a very brutal one, of what the amendment tries to deal with. After the Rwandan genocide in 1994, nothing happened. After the Bangladesh genocide in 1970, nothing ever happened. After the Cambodian genocide, nothing ever really happened. We still do not know what will happen, if it ever does, about Daesh's genocide against Christians, Yazidis and so on, and companies will never be held to account for what they were involved in.

I realise that time is short, so I will conclude. Neither this amendment nor the one to the Trade Bill ties the Government's hands. The amendment does not give courts the right to proceed with investigations without reference. It does not give them the power to make criminal punishment, and it does not strike down trade deals or force criminal prosecutions. It would raise to the attention of the Government and the world that, at last, a domestic court here in the UK—the High Court or maybe the Court of Session—will be able to rule that, in all probability, genocide has taken place, and any financial institution, company or organisation involved with that area where genocide has taken place or with that country would no longer be allowed to do so. The Government would have to make that decision; that is the point.

I understand that, this week, the Board of Deputies of British Jews is coming out in support of the amendment to not only this Bill but, importantly, the Trade Bill. I also understand that the US Senate, having seen what we have put forward, now plans to do the same. We have a chance here for leadership in the world. I thought we left the European Union to empower our courts and to give leadership. Again and again, I have been told by Ministers,

[*Sir Iain Duncan Smith*]

“Not this, not now, not here.” The simple question I ask is, “Exactly when, what and how?” because that is never answered.

I finish by reading this:

“First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”

We need to speak out for all these oppressed peoples, whether it is in finance or in trade, and take the moral high ground.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I emphasise that before too long I will have to take the time limit down to four minutes, and I know that the SNP spokesperson is aware of this. I call Alison Thewliss.

4.30 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) [V]: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will certainly do the best I can within the constraints of the technology that we have. I wish everybody a guid new year.

As colleagues will see, the SNP has tabled a range of amendments to this wide-ranging portfolio Bill. We have done so because we feel very strongly that the Bill was an opportunity to strengthen consumer protection; to take on the long-running and vexed issue of mortgage prisoners; to look at the wider responsibilities of financial services firms in areas of climate change, the sustainable development goals, ethics, money laundering and criminality; and to try our very best to mitigate the unfolding disaster that is Brexit.

On the first day of trading after the transition period ended, the City of London lost €6 billion in euro-denominated trading to venues in Amsterdam and Paris by companies such as London Stock Exchange Group, CBOE, and Aquis Exchange. EY has said that £1.2 trillion of assets and 7,500 jobs had moved from the UK to the EU before 31 December. Trade frictions are apt to make this situation worse. Only last week, the Prime Minister was asking businesses what further divergence they would like to see. On the contrary, the message that we get when talking to City figures is that the only folk pushing for deregulation are Tory Back Benchers. Businesses see the importance of having open access to the EU market. It is vital that the UK authorities take into account the impact of frictions before taking us further away from the rules that the rest of Europe abides by.

SNP amendment 8 would ensure that the likely effects of the rules on trade frictions between the UK and EU are considered before part 9C rules are taken. Amendment 11 does the same for CRR—capital requirements regulation—rules. Our new clause 20 would force the Tories to come clean on the impact of financial services divergence from the EU. We feel very strongly that it is possible that if Scotland had been permitted to

negotiate its own EU deal, taking into account our priorities, financial services operations could well have moved to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. It would certainly be better than how things are operating currently, with added layers of complexity. I have heard that a trader in London now cannot speak to an EU-based client without an EU-based trader also on the call to chaperone. The UK Government face a choice between two options: to try to achieve equivalence with the EU, which will essentially leave them a rule-taker with no seat at the decision-making table, or to forget about equivalence altogether and tear up the rulebook. It is expected that this latter option will encourage EU efforts to strip financial services businesses from the UK, losing well-paid jobs and skills not just in London but in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and other places too. We certainly did not vote for such an outcome.

Moving on to money laundering and financial crime, successive UK Governments have failed to tackle money laundering. The Minister gave this a hefty further kick into the long grass of a further call for evidence in his response to the amendments proposed by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) also reiterated the need for action. Our new clause 14 would force Westminster to come clean on tax avoidance and the misuse of Scottish limited partnerships, about which the Minister knows I care a great deal. New clause 14 would show how little impact this Bill has on tax avoidance. With the Chancellor talking of a return to austerity, tax rises and public pay constraint, it is galling that there is no urgency from the UK Government in tackling tax avoidance and evasion on the other side of that balance sheet. It beggars belief, still, that the Tories' 2018 Act left an oligarchy loophole allowing money laundering by overseas trusts to buy UK property with impunity—and they still have not acted on SLPs.

Clause 31 amends schedule 2 of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 to ensure that regulations can be made in respect of trustees with links to the UK. Without this, any powers that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs sought to exercise to access information on such trusts are at risk of being held invalid under legal challenge. The UK Government must introduce a robust and transparent system of company registration in order to combat money launderers' attempts to register entities for illicit purposes. The UK Government must also act to tackle the ongoing improper use of SLPs via proper, thorough reform of Companies House.

The UK Government really ought to accept cross-party amendment 7 to tackle financial crime and genocide, standing in the name of the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), my relentless colleague on the Treasury Committee. Failure to take action on this important human rights agenda will never be forgotten. This UK Government are forever keen to talk up their global Britain credentials, so this amendment is a significant opportunity to take that lead. It builds on the UK Government's adoption of Magnitsky sanctions. I implore the Minister: we should never allow those who have had a hand in genocide to make their investments in the UK.

We also strongly support cross-party new clause 4, which would make it an offence for a relevant body registered by the FCA to facilitate, or fail to prevent,

specified economic crimes. That is an area in desperate need of tightening, because too many are getting away with it at the moment.

I have previously given the Minister a wee bit of slagging for the Bill, and I made a pretty safe prediction that our diligent amendments would be dismissed in Committee. The Government's U-turn on electronic payment legislation, which they dismissed in Committee, shows why our financial safety depends on parliamentary scrutiny, and the introduction of such a measure at this late stage gives me some concern. In Committee, the Government dismissed the need to cover electronic money institutions and the difficulties around DAMLs—defences against money laundering—despite the urgency of that issue, yet today we have a slew of Government amendments, new clauses, and even a whole new schedule.

Electronic money institutions expected to see something in the Bill. The Opposition tabled amendments to correct that. The Minister said that he would update Members on Report, but it is late in the day to bring such comprehensive amendments to the House. I would be grateful for clarity on whether Government amendments missed the boat in the first draft, or whether there is another reason. I am concerned that we have not been given the evidence to ascertain whether the drafting and content of the amendments provide what electronic money institutions are looking for. It would have been good to have such information, so that we could have taken evidence on it at the start of this process.

This issue goes to the heart of many of the concerns felt by me and my colleagues. Legislation is not done well here at the best of times, and financial services is a huge area that requires legislation, oversight and expertise. The Government say they are taking back control, but they are taking it from Brussels and giving it straight to unseen bureaucrats and regulators, with little role for this House. At the very least, MPs must be afforded the same level of power and influence that MEPs enjoyed. We know that little time and priority are given to SI Committees, and that Committees such as the European Scrutiny Committee have no real impact on regulation. Select Committees are already incredibly busy, and scrutiny of these new powers must not be squeezed into already limited time and space, especially given the work that the Treasury and BEIS Committees now have, due to the covid fallout and the economic recovery.

With this place not having even a budget committee, SNP Members find it doubtful that the Treasury's new powers will receive the scrutiny they deserve. That is why we want a specific committee to deal with the swathes of powers that are being handed back to the Treasury, the FCA and the PRA. We must ensure that the use of those powers is subject to the affirmative scrutiny procedure, and new clauses 15 and 16 seek to address that issue. Until the regulatory framework review has been published, and a new oversight structure agreed, such clauses are vital to ensure that Government and the FCA consult Parliament, before using the powers in the Bill in a way that would make Henry VIII blush.

On areas of consumer interest, I fully support new clause 7, tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy). Her speech in Committee was well-informed and passionate, and I suspect the Minister knows as well as the rest of us that she was correct to raise those concerns. There must be consumer protection for those using buy now, pay later schemes of

all types. Clearpay and Klarna are on just about every retail website these days, and the lack of regulation around them exposes all our constituents to significant risk. Covid has led to job losses approaching 1 million, with implications for those who have outstanding debts. That toxic situation will only cause hardship in the long run, and the UK Government would do well to listen to the hon. Member for Walthamstow and act today, rather than waiting for trouble to be heaped on our constituents in future.

I was glad to see the Minister make moves towards Help to Save accounts, which I raised in Committee. I still have serious concerns that people who have managed to save some cash might lose access to it, although his assurances go some way to addressing those fears. It makes a degree of sense to transfer money into the same account that Help to Save bonuses were paid into, but the proportion of accounts where that is not possible must be closely monitored. I would like to know more about how National Savings and Investments will contact those who have poor literacy and may be disengaged, and I assure the Minister that I will be keeping a close eye on that. Saying that customers will be contacted could mean they get a letter in the post that they do not open and it goes into a pile with the rest of the unopened mail—we all have constituents who do that, and they have a right for their savings to be protected, along with those of everybody else.

I intend to press SNP new clause 21 on the financial services duty of care to a vote this afternoon. Macmillan Cancer Support was incredibly helpful in drafting the new clause, and I pay tribute to all those who are struggling not just through covid, but through cancer treatment as well. Under new clause 21, the FCA must ensure that financial services providers act with a duty of care and in the best interests of all consumers. It would amend the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 by inserting a "duty of care specification" and bringing that into the FCA's general duties. There would be an explicit requirement on the FCA to secure an appropriate degree of protection for consumers, and to ensure that authorised persons carrying out regulated activities act with that duty of care.

Who would not want to see this? Macmillan has been clear that at present things are quite piecemeal and the current system is just not working for consumers. It has proposed this change for several reasons, not least because its research suggests that only 11% of people tell their bank about a cancer diagnosis. Macmillan suggests that it would be much better if the banks assumed that people may be vulnerable, rather than waiting for people to get into difficulties while going through cancer treatment, which will only add to their stress. One in three people with cancer experience a loss of income from employment following a diagnosis, losing an average of around £860 a month. That makes it more difficult for them to pay their bills, or to meet any other debts and obligations, which is why this proposal is so important and relevant.

Our new clauses 24, 25 and 26 would ensure that no more homeowners have their mortgages sold to vulture funds. As I said at the beginning, the Bill gives the UK Government an opportunity to deal with this long-standing injustice, and I urge them to give it further consideration. Some have argued that those who ended up as mortgage prisoners were somehow just bad borrowers who got into trouble when they lived beyond their means, but

[Alison Thewliss]

more often than not that is actually very far from the reality. As the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton pointed out, an expert analyst enlisted by the all-party parliamentary group on mortgage prisoners has concluded that it is not the case, and it is not how markets and ratings agencies see the situation either.

The APPG's analysis of the mortgage books has established that at the point of origination, Northern Rock loans were all prime mortgages with lower than average default rates, exhibiting good borrower behaviour; that if we adjusted for standard variable rate overpayments coming in line with other high street lenders, not only would these borrowers potentially be up to date with the payments, but their loan balances would also be around 10% lower; and that if we adjusted to competitive rates on the market, the difference would be even more substantial. The bond markets paid over the market value for the books, indicating that anyone in those books is, in fact, paying over the market value for the standard variable rates. People have been stuck in these mortgages for nine years and it is high time for the UK Government to act. I appreciate what the Minister says about other actions, but for those listening there is very little to justify further delay in doing the right thing, on top of the delays that they have already faced.

We will rely on SMEs for our economic recovery, and our new clause 11 would ensure that they are treated fairly by the big banks to avoid the mistakes of last crisis. Many conversations at the Treasury Committee have reflected the fact that the banks and regulators do not want to repeat scandals such as RBS GRG, but we feel very strongly that we must take the opportunity of this Bill to go further. The Federation of Small Businesses has issued a stark warning that around a quarter of a million small businesses could be forced to close this year due to a lack of Government support. In a survey of 1,400 small firms, 5% stated that they expected to pull down the shutters this year. If replicated across the UK, these figures would mean 250,000 firms closing down if the Tory Government continue to sit on their hands.

The owners of these SMEs are often very heavily personally exposed if their business fails. Their family homes are at risk, just as if they were mis-sold a mortgage. The FCA has already recognised in its 2015 discussion paper "Our approach to SMEs as users of financial services" that they are often no more financially sophisticated than everyday consumers, but are at risk of mis-selling because of product complexity, limited choice and poorly managed expectations. I could say an awful lot more about this, but I appreciate the time constraints. I would just point out that, as things stand, a sole trader with a property empire of £30 million can sue for breaches of the rules, whereas an ice cream van owner whose accountant tells him to incorporate for tax reasons cannot. It is a very illogical distinction between individuals who can take action and companies that cannot. I strongly urge the Minister to look at that.

This Bill was an opportunity to do an awful lot more in a number of areas. As I and the Labour Front Benchers have set out, there is still much more that should be done to secure a future for financial services—a future that has been entirely undermined by Brexit, which will

make things significantly more difficult. Huge questions on equivalence remain unanswered, and there is still no certainty of an agreement on a regulatory equivalence deal between the UK and the EU. For financial services, this deal is effectively a no-deal Brexit, which neither Scotland nor the City of London voted for. UK firms and their employees can no longer operate freely in the EU, and this has been a source of shockwaves across the sector. Worse still, there is no timescale for any kind of agreement.

Many companies are choosing to move their operations to the EU, rather than hang around for an indefinite period of time for an equivalence deal. The UK Government have given very little consideration to financial services in the negotiations, and there are far-reaching implications—far beyond those who work in the sector, but for each and every one of our constituents who needs that certainty and who needs interactions with financial services to be done properly for their own protection.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) [V]: I refer to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I also wish briefly to thank the Leader of the House for eventually listening to sense and allowing virtual participation in debates of this sort; it has been a positive development.

4.45 pm

I know from our discussions that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury agrees with me when I suggest that the Bill provides an excellent opportunity to tidy up and improve the regulatory landscape for investors, particularly those with smaller portfolios. I suggest that, in helping to achieve that aim, we must reduce the needless obstacles to better investing, a good example of which is what are called key information documents, or KIDs. In the past, EU regulations have insisted that every single investment trust must produce KIDs to help investors better to understand what they are buying.

Briefly, for those who do not know what investment trusts are, they are like any other publicly quoted or listed company, such as a Shell or a Glaxo, but instead of managing oil or pharmaceuticals, they manage investments on behalf of their shareholders. They have a very good track record—they have outperformed unit trusts and, indeed, the benchmarks—and over the years they have played an integral role in helping investors to achieve their financial goals. The first one, Foreign and Colonial, was established in 1868, and the largest now, the Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust, is a FTSE 100 company with assets under management of around £15 billion.

Investment trusts have played an important role, yet they are having to labour under these things called key information documents. The EU's intention might have been good, but the execution has been poor, and perhaps even dangerous. The central problem with these documents is that, as the Economic Secretary knows, they are very misleading, particularly when it comes to the assessment of risk and the projection of returns. The most dangerous aspect is that they ignore the age-old advice that past performance is no guide to the future, because they extrapolate recent returns as a guide to the future; KIDs produced in a bull market—or a good market—will therefore suggest higher returns, and vice versa.

KIDs are also misleading when it comes to risk, in the sense that they use summary risk indicators—SRIs—to express risk in a single figure, from 1 for low risk up to 7 for high risk. They have misled investors into believing that investment trusts are lower risk when they simply are not. It is generally accepted that investment trusts are higher risk, at least in the short term, because of their higher volatility, but long-term investors are prepared to accept that volatility because of their better track record, on average over time, when compared with both unit trusts and the benchmarks.

The real problem for the UK authorities is that although the more experienced investors will just ignore the key information documents, the less experienced, typically smaller, investors will suffer the most. It is little wonder that the industry reaction generally has been very poor: the investment trusts' respected trade body, the Association of Investment Companies—the AIC—has advised investors to “burn before reading”.

Now that we have left the EU and the transition period has come to an end, and having onshored the relevant EU regulations, Government amendments will enable the FCA to address the key problems, including the misleading performance information and the SRIs. We are now looking to the FCA to conduct a wide-ranging consultation as to the way forward and, as previously promised, to work closely with the AIC and other bodies and investors; it has a duty to act swiftly. I have suggested to the Economic Secretary that the KIDs regime should be completely suspended, and if not, KIDs should be excluded from scope. If they are not, perhaps they should even be allowed to be pushed to one side, to enable proper consultation courtesy of the FCA.

I strongly urge the Economic Secretary to keep a watchful eye on the FCA's progress. I look forward to hearing from him when he sums up, and to continuing our constructive dialogue on trying to ensure that these unnecessary regulatory hurdles come to an end for the betterment of investors generally. We must remove KIDs from investment trusts so that they can do no more harm.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab) [V]: I will speak about new clause 4, which is in my name and those of others from across the House. I start by thanking Sue Hawley and Spotlight on Corruption for their support in our work.

Historically, Britain has prided itself on offering honesty and integrity, particularly in financial services, but, tragically, the Government's actions and inactions have helped to breed an environment where fraud and corruption flourish. Today Britain is the jurisdiction of choice for too many villains and kleptocrats. The National Crime Agency estimates that £100 billion is laundered through Britain annually. The recent FinCEN leaks named 3,267 UK-incorporated shell companies and nearly £70 billion flowed from Russia into the UK's overseas territories. The banks and those who run them often get away scot-free if they turn a blind eye to dirty money or engage in fraud.

New clause 4 would provide law enforcement agencies with a powerful tool in their fight against money laundering and fraud. A new criminal offence would hold individuals, corporations and their directors to account for either facilitating or failing to prevent economic crime. The argument is overwhelming; everyone agrees that the existing powers are weak and ineffectual. We need

criminal as well as regulatory powers. A new offence would provide both an effective deterrent and stronger consequences.

We are way behind our international competitors. We pursue small businesses and let the big banks and well-heeled bankers off the hook. The British public hate feeling that there is one law for the powerful institutions and their leaders and another for the rest of us. As we build Britain outside Europe, it is foolish and wrong to think that we can create a sustainable and strong finance sector on the back of dirty money and fraud. Losing our reputation for integrity will over time damage our prosperity, so we have to clean up our act, and clean it up now, not promise to do so some time in the future.

It is shameful to find that America is more effective at pursuing corporations and their directors than we are. Let us consider Standard Chartered, a British-headquartered bank. In 2019, it was fined for money laundering failures and breaching sanctions—£102 million in the UK, but £842 million in the USA. In both the LIBOR scandal and the subsequent rigging of foreign exchange rates, most of the outrageous behaviour took place here in the UK, but most of the fines were imposed in the US. In 2019, the US dished out £1.67 billion-worth of money-laundering fines. We took less than £300 million. The Government may want to promote outsourcing, but does that really mean we want to outsource enforcement to the Americans?

That is why the director of the Serious Fraud Office has called for corporate liability reform. Last October, she said:

“So, what would be on my wish list for the SFO, if I had a magic wand?”

Unsurprisingly, a ‘failure to prevent’ offence still tops it.”

I agree, and I agree with the *Financial Times* comment, after the Barclays fraud case failed, that

“the bank could not be held accountable for the actions of the chief executive, but neither could the chief executive be accountable for the actions of Barclays.”

Is that really what the Government want? The right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright) described the LIBOR scandal as demonstrating

“weaknesses in our current law”,

and noted the

“clear implications for the reputation of our justice system.”

The Minister is wrong: when the Government called for evidence on a new corporate liability offence, three quarters of respondents urged the Government to toughen up the regime with criminal sanctions, and most of those were private companies and law firms. Why are the Government reluctant to act? They promised action in their 2015 manifesto. They took forever to complete a consultation and now they are parking the proposal with the Law Commission. Why? The House should not need to divide on this issue. Most people strongly agree with our proposal. If Ministers kick the proposal into the long grass, they will anger the public, damage the long-term integrity and reputation of our financial services sector, and fail to build a better Britain. I urge support for our new clause.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Lady. I want to speak in support of new clause 4, and I will start where she finished by reminding the House that this was a manifesto promise

[Nigel Mills]

of the Conservative party back in 2015. We said that we would introduce criminal sanctions for failure to prevent economic crime. We got as far as introducing sanctions for bribery and tax evasion. What those two measures have shown is that these “failure to prevent” rules actually work: they do crack down, they do change behaviours and they do stop businesses allowing their staff to carry out the activity or turning a blind eye to it. When the main counter-argument is that these regulations would be too expensive or too hard to implement, we have to understand that the world has carried on with those two powers in place; that is not a compelling argument for not extending them to the rest of the economic crimes as this clause would do. Most economic crime around bribery or tax evasion includes some money laundering as well, so all that we are really doing is tidying up the rules to make sure that they are consistent across the piece.

I think that it is probably fair to say that, since we made that manifesto promise, we have been a little busy on other matters, but now we are through most of those it is time to get back to delivering on that promise. I suspect that we will not convince most Members this evening to accept this new clause, but, hopefully, when we see the Law Commission review later in the year, we can then make some rapid progress on getting our law to the right place.

The Minister said at the start of this debate that the Bill was a part of our taking back control following Brexit, that we would try to make our regulations world-leading and that that was our aspiration. Surely as we embark on our vision of global Britain, we should make it very clear that our values are to be the cleanest financial services sector in the world—not the dirtiest, not a magnet for dirty money, and not one that tolerates any kind of bad behaviour. We need the powers in the new clause so that we can say clearly to the whole world that this behaviour is not tolerated here and that we will go after not only those who behave in that way, but those who allow it to happen: we will go after those businesses that seek to profit from allowing their staff to behave in such a way. That is the kind of vision that a global Britain should have—more beacon than buccaneer in this kind of situation.

Finally, if we are really after world-leading regulation in this area and setting an example, I personally would support more divergence. That is one reason why I supported Brexit, but I am not sure that the best way to start diverging is by not following the EU’s anti-money laundering rules. Last month, it introduced its sixth anti-money laundering directive, which included the requirement that member states take criminal sanctions for failure to prevent money laundering. We did not opt into that directive before the end of the transition period. I would have thought that, as a signal of good will when we want the EU to recognise our financial services regulation, it would be a good thing to adopt. It is the right thing to do. It is the right measure. It is one that, given the size of our financial services industry, we should be leading on, not following. Let us not make that our first divergence. Let us introduce these rules. Let us pass this new clause and have real powers in place which we need to tackle this awful economic crime.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Let me just say that after our next speaker, John McDonnell, the time limit will be cut to four minutes.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): From the speeches of the previous two speakers, we can see that there is a thread running through the bulk of the amendments. It is that no matter how significant the contribution of our financial services to our economy, the widespread concerns about the probity of their operations should not be ignored.

New clause 1 standing in my name and the names of other hon. Friends would require the Government to publish a report; to come clean about the standard, conduct and ethics of businesses in the financial services; and to assess publicly the prevalence of unlawful practices such as tax evasion and money laundering and the prevalence of charging excess fees, tax avoidance and providing inadequate advice to consumers. New clause 1 would require the Government to consider and report on the case for a public inquiry and any plans for further reform of regulation.

The FCA plays a core role in the regulatory structure, and in this Bill it is gaining even greater powers. The appointment of the FCA chief is critically important therefore in determining the effectiveness of our whole regulatory system. For that reason, amendment 3 in my name would ensure that before the appointment of a new chief executive, the Treasury would publish a report on the FCA’s effectiveness under the outgoing chief executive. That would allow lessons to be learned. Amendment 4 would give some teeth to parliamentary scrutiny of the FCA by making the appointment of the chief executive subject to approval by the Treasury Committee.

5 pm

If Members have any doubts about the need for regulatory reform, I recommend a swift read through the litany of recent reports of scandals, highlighting the FCA’s shortcomings and how it has been asleep at the wheel. London Capital & Finance was a large-scale Ponzi scheme. Connaught Income Fund was ripping off consumers. The notorious Woodford Equity Income Fund was milking investors. RBS has been forcing companies into administration in order to seize their assets.

Many Members have dealt with constituents who have been the victim of these scandals and who have lost their livelihoods, their savings and pensions, their firms, their homes and, in some tragic instances, their lives through stress or suicide. As has been mentioned, the US Financial Crimes Enforcement Network now assesses the UK as a “higher risk jurisdiction”, and that is based upon the number of UK companies appearing in suspicious activity reports. I share the view of other Members who have spoken today. The Government should not be complacent on this matter. It is time to start cleaning up the stables.

I have also tabled new clause 2, on debt. Due to the covid pandemic, the number of households in severe problem debt has doubled to 1.2 million. It is estimated that 800,000 households are behind with their rent. New clause 2 simply asks the Government to bring forward to this House, within six months of this Bill becoming an Act, a report assessing the scale of the debt problem, the effectiveness of current mechanisms and the potential for additional mechanisms and policies.

To be helpful, let me put a few ideas to the Government. Some of these issues with debt have been caused by the Government themselves, so I urge them to scrap the benefit cap, the two-child limit and the bedroom tax, to introduce a real living wage of £10 an hour, and to abandon their proposals for a public sector pay freeze.

The Treasury Minister will also be aware that the Bank of England base rate is currently just 0.1%. That is not the rate for many consumers, who are paying 25% interest on credit card debt, or payday lenders, who can charge up to 0.8% a day, nearly 3,000 times the Bank of England base rate. It is time the Government brought forward legislation to curtail these appalling interest rates. When debt was a problem for the banks in the 2008 crisis, the Government intervened to lift the burden of bad debts. It was good enough for the banks, so I suggest that the Government examine the work of Johnna Montgamerie, who is calling for a similar long-term refinancing scheme now to lift the debt burden from our hard-hit constituents. They need the Government to act to lift them out of potential poverty and penury now.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to speak in this debate in support of new clause 7, which is in the name of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), who I gather will speak shortly. It is absolutely vital that we accelerate regulation of this newly emerging sector before we see the sort of problems that emerged in the rent-to-own sector in recent years.

I am glad to hear that the Government, the FCA and the sector recognise that regulation is necessary, but I also note that there is little consensus on what that regulation should consist of, or what legislative vehicle it could be contained within. I further note that support from the sector is conditional on its being, in its view, in consumers' interest. I am not sure it should be the judge of what is in consumers' interest.

Clearly, it is far better for people who can afford to pay just once to do so, but I recognise that there is a legitimate market for a well-regulated "buy now, pay later" sector. However, it has to ensure that consumers are not taken advantage of. The sector likes to point out that the fastest rate of growth is in the over-40 market, thereby suggesting that its users are among the more financially responsible, but younger customers represent the majority of those missing payments and putting themselves at risk by having recourse to risky forms of lending. As innovative as "buy now, pay later" might be, that innovation is driven by competition—by a desire for market capture by the major players. So while one proposes a voluntary code of conduct, another chooses not to sign up to it. That makes me worried as to the willingness of the sector to co-operate with the regulators. What we do not want to see is regulatory capture by these major players.

I want to ensure that those who miss their payments are unable to make further purchases with not only one provider, but all providers of BNPL. If Klarna prevents a further purchase by a consumer because they have already missed a payment, they should not be able automatically to switch to Laybuy, Clearpay or one of the other providers. Moreover, these providers should not be a default purchasing option on a website when a consumer seeks to make a purchase; this is a clear example of the growing lockdown phenomenon of 'emotional e-commerce'.

I recognise that this Bill is not perhaps the right vehicle to manage how the websites are laid out, but this is a clear driver in the growing use of this form of payment.

I have already seen the problem debt my constituents have accrued in the rent-to-own sector, and those firms also sought to portray themselves as acting responsibly to protect consumer interests. I do not want to see those same constituents using BNPL schemes and getting into a similar situation, with a similar rhetoric from those providers. Regulation is now needed sooner rather than later, before these commercial models become ever more entrenched. With every week that passes, the influence of BNPL increases, the more we see the adverts on the TV and the more we see it appearing when we make online purchases. The lack of consumer protection in this regard puts more of those purchasing online at risk.

I very much welcome what the Minister has had to say to me, both in the House and privately. I look forward to seeing the Woolard review and hearing about the next steps that will be taken to make practical progress on this very pressing matter.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). I, too, want to focus on new clause 7, but I also want to mention breathing space, which is addressed in new clauses 22 and 23, and the statutory debt repayment scheme, which is dealt with in clause 32. We all know that BNPL has exploded in the past year. More and more retail outlets, and even online gambling companies, are using it, and it is being sold to companies on the basis that, on average, customers spend 40% more. It is also being sold to customers as an easy way to spread the load, with the thought, "There are no credit checks so it is not debt." But of course it is, because people are using someone else's money to pay and it then has to be repaid. I looked into the business model for one company and found that 25% of its income is predicated on late fees and people being unable to pay on time. Surely that has to ring alarm bells, with the echoes of the high-cost lenders and their practices. The regulation is needed sooner rather than later and I look forward to a swift response to the Woolard review.

Breathing space is welcome, and I have long called for it; 60 days will often be enough, but there will be a need for flexibility in exceptional circumstances. The scheme was designed prior to the pandemic; people are furloughed, have lost their job or have a period of illness, and 60 days is not long enough to give people such time to recover from a temporary financial difficulty caused by the pandemic and set up a long-term solution. People affected by the pandemic simply need a bit more time to straighten themselves out. I also think that the midway review needs to be looked at again. It simply wastes time and resources, which are scarce in the debt field.

Breathing space alone is not enough, however, given the impact of coronavirus on household finances. Bailiffs' visits should be suspended, as they were during the first national lockdown, and other enforcement action should be halted when a debt adviser alerts the creditor that a client has financial or other issues due to coronavirus. We should also be suspending the use of non-priority benefit deductions from universal credit and bringing forward plans to extend the repayments over a longer period.

[Yvonne Fovargue]

Moving on to the statutory debt repayment plan, I am pleased that the intention is that people seeking debt advice should not be charged for any aspect of the plan. It has always seemed counterintuitive that people in debt should be charged to get out of the very same debt. However, there are areas that need to be tightened—for example, where creditors are objecting to the level of payments. That needs to be seen within the existing debt advice methodology and budget standards. We cannot have creditors objecting just because they do not like the level or they think that someone else has more. There is a common standard, and creditors need to accept that.

In general, the Bill is a welcome step forward in assisting people in debt, but the landscape of debt solutions is complicated and difficult to navigate. I believe that a full review of all debt solutions needs to be undertaken to clarify and simplify, and to ensure that people in debt are always able to access the solution that best suits their needs.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I rise to say just a few words about new clause 4 and amendment 7, both of which I support. New clause 4, on the facilitation of economic crime, has been ably tabled by the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), who, together with me and many others across the House, has sought to drive forward this agenda. The agenda is driven forward by the Bill, which has been so ably handled by my hon. Friend the Minister. It goes with the grain of Government policy and builds on the changes already achieved. I do not think that the House should be divided on it today, but we should send a signal to the Government about the importance of pursuing this agenda.

We have, as I said, achieved considerable change. The right hon. Member for Barking and I managed to persuade the Government to introduce open registers of beneficial ownership, both for the overseas territories and now for the Crown dependencies. The Foreign Office was not in favour of that at the time, but it now strongly supports it, so progress can be made. We are building on the excellent G8, where these matters were first championed by David Cameron as Prime Minister, and also on the recent US legislation. The evidence of the Paradise and Panama papers showed without any doubt the sophistication of financial advisers and the fact that there is an inequality of arms in so much of this. They are ahead of the financial enforcement authorities, and we need to be aware of that. The Bill helps, but new clause 4 would drive the matter further forward in clamping down on the facilitation of economic crime. I hope that the Minister will send a clear message on that when he sums up. I would also say to him that the reforms to Companies House led the world, but the trouble is that Companies House has become a sort of library, rather than an investigator. What it needs is more resources, and I very much hope that he will make the point across Government that Companies House with more resources would be an extremely valuable tool in the fight against economic crime.

Amendment 7—the genocide clause, as it were—has been tabled so ably by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith).

He makes the point that money cannot somehow be divorced from its provenance. We have had much focus on money laundering, on dirty money and on money stolen by corrupt dictators from Africa, by business people and by warlords. Shining the light of transparency on this is incredibly important, and this is a good amendment because it underlines our abhorrence of genocide. I have worked with much pleasure with the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) on what the UN Committee that visited Burma and Bangladesh referred to as the genocidal activities over the Rohingya, and with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green on the human rights abuses in China. The House is right to take a very strong line on the issue of genocide. If global Britain means anything, it is driven by values. These values matter, and when regimes such as the Saudis, for example, butcher journalists in foreign consulates or imprison women campaigning for human rights, we should speak out.

5.15 pm

However, I have to tell the House that we have questions to answer here in the UK on the issue of genocide. There are today five alleged perpetrators of genocide living freely in the UK, one of whom was involved in the terrible genocidal massacre at Murambi. They have been caught up in the British legal system now for 13 years—lost in an ineffective legal system, with huge legal costs and huge benefit claimant costs to the taxpayer.

I hope very much that my hon. Friend on the Front Bench will make it clear that, when the genocide debate takes place later this month, we expect a Minister to say from the Dispatch Box what Britain is doing to ensure that these five alleged perpetrators are brought to justice.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I support amendments 1, 2 and 8 and the remarks made by our Front-Bench team to oppose any post-Brexit race to the bottom in regulation. It is also vital that we move towards a deal on equivalence in financial services with the EU.

Financial regulation has to adapt to market innovations to ensure that consumers are well protected, and it is under this call for consumer protection that I also speak in support of new clauses 24 to 26. These push for a fair deal for the 250,000 mortgage prisoners stuck for 10 years paying high interest rates. The all-party parliamentary group on mortgage prisoners, which I co-chair, has been contacted by hundreds of mortgage prisoners, who describe the worry and the stress that comes from being trapped as they are. The Minister suggested that the SVRs paid by mortgage prisoners are just 0.4% higher than SVRs at other lenders. Our case studies, which include nurses, teachers, members of the armed forces and small business people, tell another story.

It is inappropriate to compare the rates that borrowers with inactive lenders are currently paying with those paid by SVR customers of other active lenders. If mortgage prisoners were with an active lender and up to date with payments, they would have access to a product transfer giving them a lower fixed rate. I will illustrate this through two constituents. The first is with an active lender. Last year, when she contacted my office, she was paying an SVR of 4.14%, but as she was with an active

lender, we were able to help make representations. She is now on a two-year fixed rate of 1.79%, and saving over £5,000 a year in mortgage payments.

The second constituent's Northern Rock mortgage was sold to Landmark and is ultimately owned by Cerberus—a mortgage with a fully regulated high street bank sold off to a vulture fund. The family are not being offered any new deals, costing them over £6,000 a year more than if they were with an active lender. I cannot put into words the stress that this has caused the family, who have nearly lost their home more than once.

When the Government sold these loans to Cerberus, UK Asset Resolution told Lord McFall that returning these mortgages to the private sector would result in borrowers being offered fixed rates. In a "Panorama" investigation two years ago, a UKAR spokesperson said that Cerberus had the ability to lend to former Northern Rock customers and that they had believed they intended to do so. They said:

"The reply to Lord McFall sent on behalf of the UKAR board of directors was based on information presented to UKAR and the board had no reason to disbelieve this at that time."

If UKAR was misled by Cerberus, to date there have been no consequences, and today we have Landmark refusing to offer my constituent any fixed rates. Capping SVRs for mortgage prisoners is an issue of consumer protection.

I turn briefly to new clauses 24 and 26. Expanding the regulatory perimeter to help mortgage prisoners is supported by the APPG and the UK Mortgage Prisoners campaign group, and there is support from the Building Societies Association, which has said:

"It is essential that the FCA and the Government take action urgently to ensure that consumers whose mortgage is sold to an unregulated lender have robust consumer protections extending to interest rates."

An expansion of the regulatory perimeter would give the FCA all the power it needs, in the words of the Governor of the Bank of England to the Treasury Committee in his appointment hearing, to "conclusively address" the question of mortgage prisoners. New clause 26 says that consumers would need to consent before their mortgage is sold on to an inactive lender. Supporting these amendments provides immediate help to mortgage prisoners who have suffered far too long and are now hit harder by the pandemic.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before I call Andrew Jones, I should say that after Stella Creasy I will reduce the limit to three minutes.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): The core purpose of the Bill is to ensure that the regulatory framework for financial services will continue to be effective now that we have left the EU. Of course, there are other measures in the Bill, on matters such as the open market arrangements with Gibraltar and debt advice; it is wide in scope.

In Committee, we considered the Bill in detail, and I commend my hon. Friend the Minister for his knowledge and vision. It would be fair to say that some of the measures that we looked at were in very specialist areas and were perhaps a little dry; I am thinking about the work to transition away from LIBOR and implement the Basel standards. That obviously had not been easy work; it had been detailed work, and the development had taken place over a significant period.

The Minister has placed certain underlying principles at the heart of his work, and we see them in the Bill. The first is ensuring that the UK will have world-leading prudential standards, and that those will be overseen by regulators with the powers they need. There is no doubt that the world, including the UK, has seen appalling financial scandals; I am thinking about insider dealing, money laundering and bank fraud. Our regulators must be equipped to deal with this fast-moving market. They must be careful that they are not so backward-looking that they are solving the last crisis, but they are also nimble enough to have proportionate regulations for the sector.

The second principle that my hon. Friend the Minister is operating under is the recognition that different types of activity, and different scales of company, require different approaches. The Bill enables the introduction of the tailored investment firms prudential regime. I believe that the whole Committee wanted to see a firmer approach taken to wrongdoing, alongside measures to ensure that the UK's strong position in this critical sector is maintained. I think that the Bill does that—indeed, that is the bulk of the Bill—but it does, of course, require regulators to enforce that properly.

A further principle of my hon. Friend's work is helping people with debt problems. We have already heard about clause 32, which introduces changes to the debt respite scheme. Those are of great significance to many of our constituents up and down the country. Essentially, there are two elements: a breathing space and a statutory debt repayment plan, the point being early intervention and recognition of the problem. That will help people escape the cycle of debt, which is sometimes very easy to get into and very hard to break out of.

In our evidence session, the Committee heard from Peter Tutton, head of policy at the debt charity StepChange. Mr Tutton described this as "a cracking scheme"—I wrote down the quote when he gave us his evidence. That is a significant endorsement of the Minister's work. The Bill also contains a measure to provide a route for a successor account when the Help to Save term matures, so that the balance is transferred to an alternative savings account—again, practical support that will help many people.

There are many new clauses and amendments before us. I welcome Government new clauses 27 and 28 and new schedule 1, which basically broaden—update, really—the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to include e-money institutions. I am pleased to see that that is supported by the Labour party in its own new clause 6, which will not be moved. There is clearly a recognition on both sides of the House that the Act needed to be updated and tackled.

New clause 7, in the name of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and many others, looks at the unregulated "buy now, pay later" market. It is easy to see how an interest-free product could help people spread payments for a sofa or other high-cost item, but it could also be a route into debt trouble. I am pleased that the Minister has commissioned a review, which is due to finish very shortly. May I just ask him to consider its recommendations very promptly?

Overall, this is a good Bill. I thought that the Committee scrutinised it well, and I will support it this evening.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I shall speak to new clause 7, in my name and those of over 70 other Members from across the House.

This Christmas, one in four consumers used “buy now, pay later” credit to pay for their Christmas shopping. It is a simple premise: these companies allow people to spread payments for items over a series of weeks, breaking what seems a high cost up front into chunks they can take out on their debit or credit card, with no interest charged. There is a place for this industry in the UK, just as there is a place for payday lenders like Wonga, but Wonga is no longer with us because it used technology to exploit an age-old problem that many face: too much month at the end of their money. In lending to who it did and in the way that it did, ultimately Wonga went bust, but not before it had plunged millions in the UK into debt.

The companies in question say that it is not fair to compare—that this is just how millennials want to buy. Well, as old as I am, I do know this: when it comes to credit, if the deal is too good to be true, it probably is. Compare the Market research shows that these forms of credit have been used 35% more during the pandemic as everybody shops online. Most UK retailers have Klarna, Clearpay or Laybuy now as a payment option—indeed, it is often the first one people are given. Retailers pay for their services because they know that if people use them, they will probably spend more than they are meant to—on average 30% to 40% more. *Which?* research shows that 24% of users spent more than they planned to because such an option was available at the checkout. As the Minister said, many then end up taking out debt to repay that debt. If it looks too good to be true, it is.

Increasingly, consumers are being caught out, committing to more spending than they can afford. Twenty-seven per cent. of users said that they used the option because they could not afford the product they were buying outright in the first place. Currently, this slips through a regulatory loophole because the companies do not charge interest and make you pay within—[*Inaudible.*] It means that they do not have to abide by the existing information offers that other forms of credit have to.

FCA rules require lenders, before they lend, to highlight the key costs and risks of the credit product. Contrast that with the behaviour of these companies. Shortly before Christmas, the Advertising Standards Authority upheld my complaint about adverts by Klarna that involved social media influencers encouraging followers to use Klarna to buy products to improve their mood during lockdown: if they had mental health issues, debt was the answer. On its Twitter, it tells its customers who ask about its product that it is the “smoother” way to shop. You can get

“what you want, when you want”—

with no mention of what happens if you do not pay or checking of whether you can afford to repay. And because it is not regulated, there is no redress through the Financial Ombudsman Service either.

Ministers say, “Let’s wait for the FCA report”, and that they are ready to take swift and proportionate action. That is exactly what new clause 7 does. It ensures that whatever comes out of that review will get the parliamentary time to be put into practice within three months of the Bill becoming law. If we leave it longer, waiting and waiting as we did with the payday lenders,

our constituents will suffer. Even the companies themselves, just like turkeys who think Christmas is a good idea, say that regulation should happen.

So much of the history of credit regulation in this country has been one of delay and dither—and debt as a result for our constituents. Constituents are now living through a time when millions are furloughed and many more are facing redundancy, so their income will get lower, not higher. I know that the Minister recognises that there is a problem here. I brought forward new clause 7 so that we can put his words into practice and make sure that it is not our constituents who end up paying the price later.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We come to Angela Richardson, with a three-minute limit.

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con) [V]: It was an honour to serve on the Financial Services Bill Committee and it is a privilege to speak on Report today.

I will speak to specific amendments, but first I would like to say that last century—well before the global financial crisis of this century—I was cutting my teeth in this sector, settling trades, including derivatives, for a US investment bank in New Zealand. We watched in shock as the actions of a lone trader in Singapore caused the collapse of Barings bank. I worked through the subsequent insertion of Chinese walls between departments, and saw the creation of compliance and risk management roles and the impact of a change in culture on the institution. I therefore understand the importance of proper regulation and confidence in our regulators. I was pleased to hear the Minister confirm in his opening statement that this corporate governance continues to be strengthened today.

It is only appropriate that the scope of the Bill extends to effectively tackling money laundering and providing clear, streamlined procedures for dealing with entities that engage in this type of activity. As more aspects of our lives, including financial activities, move online, so do illicit activities such as money laundering. Therefore, legislation aiming to prevent and deal with illegal financial activity must have as broad a scope as possible, bolster existing legal provisions and be as clear and as easy to enforce as possible.

New clause 6 rightly aims to broaden the scope of the Bill to prevent money laundering in the context of electronic money institutions. However, the language of the new clause is inconsistent with legislation already in place, potentially generating confusion that could result in diminished enforcement ability. The Government’s new clauses 27 and 28 and new schedule 1 better achieve the desired effect of a more robust and comprehensive enforcement regime, which is why I will support them today. I am pleased that the Opposition Front-Bench team will not move new clause 6.

5.30 pm

New clause 7 was introduced by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) with her usual passion. I will not support it this evening, although I acknowledge her intention to protect consumers as a good thing. The Government should not legislate until we hear from the experts and have a thorough understanding. The market is so broad for buy now, pay later interest-free products that passing a time-limited amendment could in fact

restrict our full understanding of these products, who uses them and how. It is important to acknowledge that, in protecting one cohort of consumers, we might unnecessarily prevent another from acquiring much-needed household goods and so on, curtail choice in the market and penalise those who are capable of budgeting the repayment of a known cost. Much better is the full and thorough public consultation and independent review, which is currently being conducted by Chris Woolard. It was helpful to hear the Minister say that the review is due to conclude soon, and that he is ready to move swiftly on evidence presented in that report.

In conclusion, the Bill is part of ensuring the future success and competitiveness of our financial services sector. An enormous amount of work has gone into producing what is a lengthy and technical Bill, and I look forward to supporting the Government in the Lobby tonight.

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP) [V]: Obviously there is much in the Bill that deserves support, although some of it has come about through our self-inflicted wounds from Brexit. However, the greatest comment I will make is on the opportunities of what should be added and on what is currently missing. I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and support points made by other Members, particularly those who spoke to amendments 4 and 30, which deal with economic and corporate crime.

We are in a difficult time at the present moment. People are suffering. They are making sacrifices. They welcome fixed penalties being given out to those who act rashly—sometimes stupidly, sometimes deliberately. Equally, they are aware that huge rip-offs are not being dealt with and remain unpunished, which causes a great deal of angst and upset. That needs to be addressed.

When I was Justice Secretary of Scotland, we set up a serious organised crime taskforce, with a model that has been replicated elsewhere and indeed has been extended to issues beyond serious organised crime. It had clear benefits, but there were also obstacles faced by law enforcement. It had the benefit of bringing together all the agencies, but they faced the same challenges. We had to recognise the extent of the challenge and bring in organisations that had previously been left out, from environmental protection through to local government. There were clear challenges in dealing with corporate crime. There is a lack of a legislative framework—there is insufficient legislation there—to allow Police Scotland, City of London Police or police services elsewhere, or the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service in Scotland, or indeed the Crown Prosecution Service south of the border, to carry out a diligent, good job. They lack the powers.

I am always minded of the Woody Guthrie song, “The Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd”:

“As through this world I’ve wandered, I’ve seen lots of funny men.

Some will rob you with a six-gun, and some with a fountain pen.”

The tragedy in this country is that it is usually quite easy to deal with those who rob you with a six-gun. Dealing with those who rob you with a fountain pen has proven far harder, which is why significant changes are required, because it is just not good enough that corporate criminals go unpunished, which we know happens. Anyone who

has seen “The Inside Job”, which includes Matt Damon, will know the fraud that went on in the financial crash. We have seen LIBOR and forex. We have seen Serco.

Meanwhile, fixed penalty notices are issued for rash and stupid actions, and rightly so, but where is responsibility being taken by the shareholders and corporate leaders? They have to be held to account. These amendments would help to address that, making sure that we have greater fairness between the small guy and the big guy, bringing us into line with the United States of America, where the wolf of Wall Street is being prosecuted, while ensuring that we keep up corporate standards, which sadly in some instances have slipped quite shamefully. It is only right and appropriate that we make sure that fraud and money laundering are dealt with every bit as strenuously and firmly as bribery and tax evasion.

These are hard times. People are making sacrifices, and it is about time that those who are abusing their powers in the corporate boardroom were held to account. We need to have the legislative framework.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I rise to support the Bill and to focus my brief remarks on the wholesale market, rather than the retail market, which most Members have addressed so far. In particular, Government amendments 22 and 23, which the Minister mentioned in his opening speech, clarify beyond any doubt that non-UK firms—all firms that do not have the UK as their principal place of business—are not within the scope of the rules on the parent undertaking. That is particularly relevant to me. I brought the subject up in my Second Reading speech, and it is something on which I have corresponded with the Minister and his team. I am very glad that he and the Treasury have engaged on the Bill in this way. It is a telling example of how good Ministers behave, and the Minister has been exemplary in taking on board comments on the Bill from a range of Members. I commend him for that.

I have a couple of short comments on what others have said. On new clause 16, tabled by the SNP, in my speech on Second Reading I gave my view that there is a need for increased scrutiny by this House of the regulators, but the Minister is right to say that we need to consider that in its entirety in the consultation on the future of the regulatory framework. That is the right way to do it. It is very important to get it right, and I look forward to sending in my remarks if I have not done so already, and seeing the Government’s response to those points.

I shall finish by addressing certain amendments that were introduced in Committee or have been mentioned today, on the European Union—new clause 12, new clause 20 and many others—whereby, effectively, Opposition Members have tried to impose requirements on the FCA or the PRA to assess the impact of the differences between the EU and UK regulatory frameworks. The conceptual problem with that is—as I think all hon. Members, and indeed the Government, need to see—that over the next five to 10 years we are going to be in a very different regulatory world. We need to think of attracting companies and investment on a global basis, not with a purely European focus as was the case in the past.

The Minister has already mentioned our success in relation to FinTech. The Chancellor has mentioned his focus on making sure that the London stock exchange

[*Bim Afolami*]

is more attractive and effective for others coming from abroad. The European Union's drivers and incentives are not the same as ours in this country, so it would be wrong for us to seek to follow the rules blindly. It is not a race to the bottom; it is a race for us in this country to win the global competition for safe, beneficial, productive capital and business. That is what the Bill helps set us up for.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (*Bim Afolami*) and to speak on a Bill that is of so much importance at this juncture for our economy and the circumstances that we face. The sector that it deals with is so important, and that cannot be overstated. The financial services sector is vital to our recovery, not just because of the jobs it provides and the tax that it contributes to the Exchequer, but because of the number of people, families and communities in this country whose future wellbeing depends on a well-regulated and successful financial services sector.

The Liberal Democrats, my own party, have tabled new clauses 22 and 23, both of which address the issue of debt repayment and recovery, but at this stage we shall not be pressing them to a Division, so I prefer not to discuss them. Instead I shall discuss the amendments that we will be supporting, specifically new clause 7, tabled by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (*Stella Creasy*), of which I am one of the signatories. As I alluded to, our support is recognition of the need to act now to create an environment that enables our economy and the people at the heart of it to recover as quickly and as financially painlessly as possible. The scale of the potential problem that awaits us as we emerge from the current crisis is frightening for businesses and for households. The most recent research from StepChange estimates that more than 3 million people are in arrears and have priority debts, and potentially 6 million people—more than the population of Scotland—are behind on household bills. For those people, that creates stress, financial hardship and sleepless nights worrying about how to feed their children.

We should have no truck with any company or organisation that in any way exploits the difficulties that covid has created. That is why I put my name forward as a co-sponsor of new clause 7, which would bring the non-interest-bearing elements of buy now, pay later lending and similar services into the regulatory ambit of the FCA. We need to act now, before we have another scandal. Such companies facilitate overspending online and costs appear lower than they actually are. One in four shoppers used such companies in the run-up to Christmas. More people are being furloughed and made redundant, so even if something seems affordable now, it might not be in future, either for the country or for individuals.

In the past year, we have heard much about the crossroads at which our economy, and indeed the country, stands. Our financial services sector was worth £132 billion to the UK economy in 2018 and had more than 1 million jobs. It has suffered. It is worth 7% of our economy. In my city of Edinburgh, we have the second-largest financial services sector in the UK and the global financial

centres index ranks it as 13th in the world. The scale of what we are facing cannot be underestimated, which is why the Bill should be amended as I suggest.

Kevin Hollinrake: I very much appreciate the efforts that the Minister is making to try to tighten up in many areas. We are on the same page about many different aspects of the measures that we are talking about. Looking at the Bill from afar and taking a helicopter view, for decades, we have been willing to preside over a system that I would describe as financial feudalism. Some people live by a completely different set of rules and are not held to account properly by the rules that are in place. Unless we start to put measures in place that hold individuals to account for some of that egregious behaviour, we will not stamp it out.

That behaviour undermines the faith in the very system that we believe in—the free market system. We cannot simply hold our hands up and say, “It’s the bankers again,” or, “It’s the money launderers again.” We have to tackle those issues and put measures in place to do that. We did with the Bribery Act 2010, which was effective in giving individuals a corporate responsibility to stamp out bribery. Again, the Government acted on tax evasion in 2017.

Such are still other areas, however, where we allow people to steal, defraud, launder and lie. That is not to say that there are not some good people in our financial institutions, and there are some very good bankers, but we need to hold individuals to account for things such as LIBOR, foreign exchange rigging, and the disgraceful scandal at HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland, where only one individual has been held to account with a directorial ban. As I have said before, over a similar period of time, between 2008 and 2018, there were £9 billion of criminal and corporate fines in the US, but £260 million in the UK.

I am glad that the Government support the principles behind new clause 4 and will bring their own measures forward. It is absolutely vital that that is not just kicking things into the long grass and that those measures are brought forward quickly so that we can hold individuals to account for failing to prevent corporate fraud and money laundering.

The key thing that I will talk about in my last 54 seconds is mortgage prisoners. Again, the fact that we let people's mortgages be sold to vulture funds in the first place is because we do not have proper regulatory oversight and we do not lean on them as the FCA can on regulated firms. The promises that were made to Lord McFall and others were simply not carried through.

New clause 25 in particular is a nuclear option. I am not a person who would like to cap anything—the market should deliver those solutions—but we do not have a proper solution for the many people who are trapped on very expensive rates. The evidence that we have suggests that this would not affect the marketplace of residential mortgage-backed securities, about which the Minister is concerned; that it would be highly effective; that we could define it for a certain cohort; and that it would relieve hundreds of thousands of people from dire financial straits overnight. I ask him to look at that again.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am going to be very strict in making sure that Members stick to the three-minute limit from now on.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab) [V]: I speak in support of new clause 2. I must stress to the Minister that debt advisers in Salford have already warned me that the Government's debt respite scheme is inadequate. First, debt advisers should be provided with the discretion to extend breathing space. Secondly, the midway review requirements will waste valuable resources and should be eliminated. Thirdly, there must be the option for debtors to access breathing space on more than one occasion in a 12-month period when needed.

5.45 pm

Those minor changes would be extremely helpful, but, of course, any breathing space can only be successful if there are effective and accessible debt solutions at the end of it. Sadly, that is rarely the case, and the pandemic has exacerbated this, with millions more households now in financial difficulty. The situation is dire, and the Minister must recognise that to encourage any level of growth as we rebuild after the pandemic, we must tackle the impending tsunami of household debt.

One solution the Minister could consider is to cap interest rates. Another is to cap the total amount that can be paid in overdraft fees or interest payments. A more comprehensive solution, however, would be the creation of a consumer version of UK Asset Resolution, the public finance company set up to purchase problem debts from the banks during the financial crash. As we know, many lenders will sell on their problem debts for a fraction of their value, only for them to be enforced again by debt collectors at their full value. Such a public vehicle would allow the offloading of these problem debts to be refinanced at affordable rates for borrowers. Only Government can borrow at low interest rates to make that happen effectively.

Lastly, the debt jubilee is the option of writing off some debts for households and businesses that will simply never be able to repay them, even at more affordable rates. Even the former Chancellor George Osborne has advocated this for small and micro businesses that have been given emergency coronavirus loans. In practice, this could mean that if a lender decided that an outstanding loan simply would not be repaid, it could discharge that debt and be given a tax break. Of course, to be truly fair, such a policy would require stringent checks and balances.

I hope the Minister will examine those proposals urgently, because to be frank, if the Government do not set out radical policy options on how to tackle the tsunami of debt, we can wave goodbye to a recovery, and many people across Salford will have their lives destroyed. If these proposals were good enough to bail out the banks in 2008—and they were—they are good enough to bail out the people.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con) [V]: There are a lot of good things in the Bill that I welcome, and I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I welcome the assistance given to financial services in Gibraltar, and I welcome a number of the technical changes to the operation of retained European law in relation to markets. I particularly welcome new clause 6, on FinTech, which is a really important growth sector for this country. Added to the listing regime changes in the Bill, this gives us the opportunity to encourage the bringing forward of initial public offerings of FinTech companies in the UK and to build a critical mass.

I have sympathy for new clause 4, but I do not want to pre-empt the work of the Law Commission. That said, the Government do have to act more swiftly and with more urgency in relation to reform of corporate criminal liability. It has been kicking around for a long time. The Justice Committee has heard compelling evidence on the need for reform. I do not accept the contention that there is a balance on this. The balance of evidence is clearly in favour of reform. Both the current and former directors of the Serious Fraud Office have highlighted the deficiency in criminal liability in this field, as have at least two former Attorneys General. I hope that as soon as the Law Commission reports, we will move swiftly to enact this reform, because we lag behind other jurisdictions in this regard.

The other area where I do not think it is necessary to legislate is progress on equivalence. Although we may not need to legislate, it is really important that the Government address this with urgency. Of course, as we build our way forward outside the EU it will not always be appropriate to follow everything by way of regulatory equivalence, but there are many instances in which it will be very much in the interests of the City and the broader financial services sector to do so.

In the immediate term, it is important that we acquire further equivalence agreements with our EU partners; that is in the interests of both sides. Currently, we have a commitment to a memorandum of understanding by the end of March, but the EU says that it has no immediate plans for further equivalence discussions. That needs to be resolved. Although it does not require legislation, we need from Ministers greater commitment to resolving the issue. There has sometimes been a feeling that financial services are being taken for granted in the Brexit negotiations; that needs to be put to bed. Financial services are the jewel in the economic crown of this country and need to be front and centre of our ongoing economic policy.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I wish to focus my remarks on amendments 1 and 2, tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) said, the amendments are desperately needed now to ensure that regulators must take into account the Government's target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. I was therefore disappointed to hear from the Minister that the Government will not support the amendments but might "consider" the matter "in the future". We cannot afford to wait. Climate emissions are cumulative, and a large part of the carbon that we produce today will stay in the atmosphere for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

If we are serious about tackling the climate emergency and reaching our 2050 target, we must reduce our emissions as quickly as possible. The sensible and least-destructive way to do that is to start to adapt our economy now; the irresponsible thing would be to leave it too late, thereby making the inevitable economic adjustment more painful for everyone. Regulation is one of the most powerful tools in our box of options: it will ensure that the whole financial sector is unified in its actions towards this really important goal and, most crucially, acts within a timeframe that reflects the climate emergency we face.

[*Florence Eshalomi*]

I do not want my two young children to ask me one day why I missed the opportunity to fight for a better, more sustainable future for them. That is why I will support amendments 1 and 2, and I urge all Members in the House to join me.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab) [V]: I wish to speak briefly in support of new clause 7, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), to whom I pay tribute for her work with campaigners on the issue. Her new clause would require buy-now-pay-later operators to be regulated by the FCA.

As others have said, buy now, pay later is a new and growing industry, the popularity of which has rocketed in the pandemic, with one company reporting a 43% increase in sales. It is a form of credit that promotes impulse buying—one in four users spend more than they planned—and it is targeted at young consumers who are pursued by companies using celebrity influencers and targeted ads. StepChange, the debt charity, is seeing many more under-40s coming forward for advice with this type of debt. Let us protect consumers and properly regulate the sector, which is currently uncontrolled and operating with a social-media-savvy face. Let us not wait for people to get into trouble with unsustainable levels of debt, particularly when we will see an increase in personal debt because of the pandemic.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I wish to focus on two areas: equivalence with the European Union for our financial services sector and financial crime. I also support the efforts to provide more protection against abuses in the consumer credit market and the mortgage market.

As a result of the Government's decision to pursue a very hard Brexit and the ending of the transition period, UK financial service companies have now lost their passporting rights to EU countries. The Government's trade and co-operation agreement with the EU in effect sidestepped financial services, putting at risk many jobs in the sector and much tax revenue for the Exchequer. The deal means that there is an agreement for goods, in which the EU has a trade surplus with the UK, but nothing for services, in which the UK has a huge trade surplus with the EU. There is a feeble non-binding declaration to establish a framework for co-operation on financial regulation, but there is no sign of any rush from the EU to grant the UK equivalence so that the loss of passporting rights can be overcome and continued market access to our financial services sector can be achieved. Perhaps the fact that €6 billion of share trading formerly done in London migrated to Paris and Amsterdam on the first day of post-Brexit trading is encouraging Brussels to drag its feet and hope that much more will follow. Over time, I fear that this Government's lack of interest in protecting equivalence for financial services is more likely to lose us jobs and revenue than inaugurate the big bang 2.0 that the Chancellor was fantasising about in the Commons earlier this week.

Financial and economic crime is a huge problem, and one that the Government have been far too slow to address. Their own estimates suggest that one in five people in the UK falls victim to fraud every year. There

is £6 billion of organised fraud against business, and this is getting worse. The extent of economic crime in the UK, including money laundering, fraud and corruption, led the Intelligence and Security Committee in its report on Russia to note that London is now considered a "laundromat" for corrupt money. As the scale of global corrupt wealth enmeshed in the UK property market becomes visible, we need an urgent step change in the Government's response, especially on transparency of overseas property ownership, and a tightening up of the company formation process in the UK. More needs to be done, and urgently, to crack down on this behaviour.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Apologies to those who failed to get in because of time constraint. I call the Minister.

John Glen: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; and I thank all Members who have tabled amendments and spoken to them today. The Bill deals with a number of important issues, which has been reflected in the wide-ranging contributions that we have heard today and over the last couple of months at various stages. I will take this opportunity to add to my earlier remarks, and to respond to some of the points raised in the contributions this afternoon.

On economic crime, I have already set out a number of actions that the Government have taken. On the specific issue of whether corporate criminal liability law should be reformed, the Law Commission is undertaking an expert review and we should await its outcome, but I note the range of views expressed today. We have discussed amendments that would bring additional activities into FCA regulation, including "buy now, pay later" products. I have heard the points raised on this matter today, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), who gave a sensible, thoughtful and constructive analysis, but I believe that it is right to wait for the Woolard review.

On the question of equivalence and divergence, I have said before that there are some areas where the UK will want to take a different approach from the EU to better suit the UK market, and some areas where we will not. I do not accept the characterisation of divergence. Regulatory regimes are not static—they evolve—and it is right that regulators should adapt to them. We have heard about the relationship between the regulators, the Treasury and Parliament. Again, I look forward to continuing these conversations through the future regulatory framework review, which will be ongoing in the coming weeks and months.

We have discussed several amendments that would require the regulators to have regard to different objectives when implementing the prudential regimes provided for in the Bill. It is right that the regulators set the detailed rules implementing these regimes, as they have the right technical expertise. That has long been a principle by which our regulators have worked over the past 20 years. These regimes are vital, but I do not believe that regulators should be required to have regard to broader questions that are not so closely related to prudential standards.

Several of today's amendments relate to issues not included in the Bill. I emphasise to the House once again that the Bill is just one part of the wider long-term strategy for financial services that will ensure that the UK financial services industry continues to be a global leader.

As is traditional at this stage of a Bill's passage, I take the opportunity to thank those who have contributed to its development and scrutiny. In particular, I thank the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) and the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) on the Opposition Front Bench, as well as the hon. Members for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), for the care and attention that they have brought to scrutinising the Bill and the constructive way in which they have approached it. I thank the Public Bill Committee for its detailed engagement with the legislation, particularly the Chairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) and the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq).

The hon. Members for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle) have provided thorough examination and important contributions on parts of the Bill, as has just been seen, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Wallasey on the recognition of her services to Parliament over nearly 29 years in the new year honours list. On this side of the House, my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) and for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami), and others, have provided characteristically thorough and thoughtful contributions.

I am grateful to the many experts who gave evidence to the Committee, and I thank the Commons staff and Clerks, Kevin and Nick, who have managed the process so smoothly. Not least, I thank the Treasury officials, Alex Patel, Liz Cronin, Fred Newman, Catherine McCloskey and Tim Garbutt. I hope the House has found my—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Minister—I know he wanted to thank more people, but we will have to take that as read—because under the Order of the House of 9 November 2020 I must now put the Questions necessary to bring proceedings on consideration to a conclusion.

6 pm

Debate interrupted (Standing Order 9(6) and Programme Order, 9 November).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E), That the clause be read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

New clause 27 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 28

FORFEITURE OF MONEY: ELECTRONIC MONEY INSTITUTIONS AND PAYMENT INSTITUTIONS

“(1) Schedule (Forfeiture of money: electronic money institutions and payment institutions) amends provisions in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 about the forfeiture of money so that they apply to money held in accounts maintained with electronic money institutions and payment institutions.

(2) Subject to subsection (3), the amendments made by that Schedule are to be treated as having come into force at the same time as the provisions they amend.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply to the amendments of Part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 as they extend to Northern Ireland.

(4) Regulations made, before this section comes into force, under—

(a) paragraph 10X of Schedule 1 to the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, or

(b) section 303Z10 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002,

apply (and are to be treated as having always applied) for the purposes of notices relating to money held in accounts maintained with electronic money institutions and payment institutions, as well as for the purposes of notices relating to money held in accounts maintained with banks and building societies.”—(*John Glen.*)

This new clause introduces NSI. It provides for the amendments in the new Schedule to have retrospective effect, except for the amendments of Part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 as they extend to Northern Ireland. The relevant provisions of that Part are not yet in force there.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 7

REGULATION OF BUY-NOW-PAY-LATER FIRMS

“Within three months of this Act being passed, the Treasury must by statutory regulations make provision for the protection of consumers from unaffordable debt by requiring the FCA to regulate—

(a) buy-now-pay-later credit services, and

(b) other lending services that have non-interest-bearing elements.”—(*Stella Creasy.*)

This new clause would bring the non-interest-bearing elements of buy-now-pay-later lending and similar services under the regulatory ambit of the FCA.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 265, Noes 355.

Division No. 194]

[6.1 pm

AYES

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
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
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
Coyle, Neil
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, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 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
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 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
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 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
 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
 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
 Shannon, Jim
 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
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam

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
 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
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara

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

NOES

Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 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 Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 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
 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
 Gray, James
 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
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 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
 Johnston, David
 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
 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
 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
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok

Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 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
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 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
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
David Rutley and
Michael Tomlinson

Question accordingly negated.

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

New Clause 21**DUTY OF CARE SPECIFICATION**

(1) The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 is amended as follows.

(2) After Section 1C insert—

“1CA Duty of care specification

(1) In securing an appropriate degree of protection for consumers, the FCA must ensure authorised persons carrying out regulated activities are acting with a duty of care to all consumers.

(2) Matters the FCA should consider when drafting duty of care rules include, but are not limited to—

(a) the duties of authorised persons to act honestly, fairly and professionally in accordance with the best interest of their consumers;

(b) the duties of authorised persons to manage conflicts of interest fairly, both between themselves and their clients, and between clients;

(c) the extent to which the duties of authorised persons entail an ethical commitment not merely compliance with rules;

(d) that the duties must be owned by senior managers who would be accountable for their individual firm’s approach.”—(*Alison Thewliss.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 267, Noes 355.

Division No. 195]

[6.12 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Carden, Dan
Abrahams, Debbie	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Ali, Rushanara	Chamberlain, Wendy
Ali, Tahir	Champion, Sarah
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Chapman, Douglas
Amesbury, Mike	Charalambous, Bambos
Anderson, Fleur	Cherry, Joanna
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Clark, Feryal
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cooper, Daisy
Bardell, Hannah	Cooper, Rosie
Barker, Paula	Cooper, rh Yvette
Beckett, rh Margaret	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Begum, Apsana	Cowan, Ronnie
Benn, rh Hilary	Coyle, Neil
Betts, Mr Clive	Crawley, Angela
Black, Mhairi	Creasy, Stella
Blackford, rh Ian	Cruddas, Jon
Blackman, Kirsty	Cryer, John
Blake, Olivia	Cummins, Judith
Blomfield, Paul	Cunningham, Alex
Bonnar, Steven	Daby, Janet
Brabin, Tracy	Davey, rh Ed
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	David, Wayne
Brennan, Kevin	Davies, Geraint
Brock, Deidre	Davies-Jones, Alex
Brown, Alan	Day, Martyn
Brown, Ms Lyn	De Cordova, Marsha
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Debbonaire, Thangam
Bryant, Chris	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Buck, Ms Karen	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Burgon, Richard	Dodds, Anneliese
Butler, Dawn	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Byrne, Ian	Doogan, Dave
Byrne, rh Liam	Dorans, Allan
Cadbury, Ruth	Doughty, Stephen
Callaghan, Amy	Dowd, Peter
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Dromey, Jack
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Duffield, Rosie

Eagle, Dame Angela	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Eagle, Maria	Lewis, Clive
Eastwood, Colum	Lloyd, Tony
Efford, Clive	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Elliott, Julie	Lucas, Caroline
Elmore, Chris	Lynch, Holly
Eshalomi, Florence	MacAskill, Kenny
Esterson, Bill	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Evans, Chris	Madders, Justin
Farron, Tim	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Farry, Stephen	Mahmood, Shabana
Fellows, Marion	Malhotra, Seema
Fletcher, Colleen	Maskell, Rachael
Flynn, Stephen	Matheson, Christian
Fovargue, Yvonne	Mc Nally, John
Foxcroft, Vicky	McCabe, Steve
Foy, Mary Kelly	McCarthy, Kerry
Furniss, Gill	McDonagh, Siobhain
Gardiner, Barry	McDonald, Andy
Gibson, Patricia	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Gill, Preet Kaur	McDonald, Stuart C.
Glindon, Mary	McDonnell, rh John
Grady, Patrick	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Grant, Peter	McGinn, Conor
Gray, Neil	McGovern, Alison
Green, Kate	McKinnell, Catherine
Greenwood, Lillian	McLaughlin, Anne
Greenwood, Margaret	McMahon, Jim
Griffith, Nia	McMorrin, Anna
Gwynne, Andrew	Mearns, Ian
Haigh, Louise	Miliband, rh Edward
Hamilton, Fabian	Mishra, Navendu
Hanna, Claire	Monaghan, Carol
Hanvey, Neale	Moran, Layla
Hardy, Emma	Morden, Jessica
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Morgan, Stephen
Harris, Carolyn	Morris, Grahame
Hayes, Helen	Murray, Ian
Healey, rh John	Murray, James
Hendrick, Sir Mark	Nandy, Lisa
Hendry, Drew	Newlands, Gavin
Hill, Mike	Nichols, Charlotte
Hobhouse, Wera	Nicolson, John
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Norris, Alex
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	O’Hara, Brendan
Hollern, Kate	Olney, Sarah
Hopkins, Rachel	Onwurah, Chi
Hosie, Stewart	Oppong-Asare, Abena
Howarth, rh Sir George	Osamor, Kate
Huq, Dr Rupa	Osborne, Kate
Hussain, Imran	Oswald, Kirsten
Jardine, Christine	Owatemi, Taiwo
Jarvis, Dan	Owen, Sarah
Johnson, Dame Diana	Paisley, Ian
Johnson, Kim	Peacock, Stephanie
Jones, Darren	Pennycook, Matthew
Jones, Gerald	Perkins, Mr Toby
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Phillips, Jess
Jones, Ruth	Phillipson, Bridget
Jones, Sarah	Pollard, Luke
Kane, Mike	Powell, Lucy
Keeley, Barbara	Qureshi, Yasmin
Kendall, Liz	Rayner, Angela
Khan, Afzal	Reed, Steve
Kinnock, Stephen	Rees, Christina
Kyle, Peter	Reeves, Ellie
Lake, Ben	Reeves, Rachel
Lammy, rh Mr David	Reynolds, Jonathan
Lavery, Ian	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Law, Chris	Rimmer, Ms Marie
	Robinson, Gavin
	Rodda, Matt

Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
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
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison

Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
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 Ayes:

David Linden and

Owen Thompson

NOES

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
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
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
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
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishty, 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 Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, 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
Duguid, David
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
Gray, James
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
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
Jenkyens, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
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
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
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
 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
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant

Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 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
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 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
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Michael Tomlinson and
David Rutley

Question accordingly negated.

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

Clause 5

PRUDENTIAL REGULATION OF CREDIT INSTITUTIONS ETC
 BY PRA RULES

Amendment made: 15, page 6, line 1, leave out “power to make rules” and insert “powers”.—(John Glen.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 30.

Clause 39

POWER TO MAKE CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISION

Amendment made: 16, page 44, line 33, at end insert—

“(1A) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision that is consequential on provision made by section (*Money laundering offences: electronic money institutions, payment institutions and deposit-taking bodies*) or (*Forfeiture of money: electronic money institutions and payment institutions*) or Schedule (*Forfeiture of money: electronic money institutions and payment institutions*).”—(John Glen.)

Clause 39 enables the Treasury, by regulations, to make provision that is consequential on any provision made by the Bill. This amendment enables the Secretary of State to exercise that power in connection with NC27, NC28 and NS1.

Clause 43

COMMENCEMENT AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISION

Amendments made: 17, page 46, line 11, at end insert—

“(za) section (*Forfeiture of money: electronic money institutions and payment institutions*) and Schedule (*Forfeiture of money: electronic money institutions and payment institutions*), except for paragraphs 10 to 21 of that Schedule as they extend to Northern Ireland,”.

This amendment provides that NC28 and NS1 come into force on Royal Assent, with the exception of the amendments of Part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 in that Schedule as they extend to Northern Ireland. The relevant provisions of that Part are not yet in force there.

Amendment 18, page 46, line 21, at end insert—

“(aa) section (*Money laundering offences: electronic money institutions, payment institutions and deposit-taking bodies*).”.

This amendment provides that NC27 comes into force two months after Royal Assent.

Amendment 19, page 46, line 23, at end insert—

“(2A) Paragraphs 10 to 21 of Schedule (*Forfeiture of money: electronic money institutions and payment institutions*) as they extend to Northern Ireland come into force on such day as the Treasury or the Secretary of State may by regulations appoint, after consulting the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland.”

This amendment and Amendments 20 and 21 provide that the paragraphs of NS1 amending Part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, as they extend to Northern Ireland, are to be brought into force by regulations. The Department of Justice in Northern Ireland must be consulted before regulations are made.

Amendment 20, page 46, line 28, after “subsection” insert “(2A).”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 19.

Amendment 21, page 46, line 34, at end insert—

“(8) The requirement to consult under subsection (2A) may be satisfied by consultation before the day on which this Act is passed (as well as by consultation on or after that day).”—(John Glen.)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 19.

New Schedule 1

FORFEITURE OF MONEY; ELECTRONIC MONEY INSTITUTIONS AND PAYMENT INSTITUTIONS

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (c. 24)

1 Schedule 1 to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (forfeiture of terrorist property) is amended as follows.

2 Part 4B (forfeiture of terrorist money held in bank and building society accounts) is amended in accordance with paragraphs 3 to 8.

3 In the Part heading, for “bank and building society” substitute “certain”.

4 (1) Paragraph 10Q (application for account freezing order) is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

(3) After that sub-paragraph insert—

“(1A) In this Part of this Schedule, “relevant financial institution” means—

- (a) a bank,
- (b) a building society,
- (c) an electronic money institution, or
- (d) a payment institution.”

(4) In sub-paragraph (7), at the appropriate places insert—

““electronic money institution” has the same meaning as in the Electronic Money Regulations 2011 (S.I. 2011/99) (see regulation 2 of those Regulations);”, and

““payment institution” means an authorised payment institution or a small payment institution (each as defined in regulation 2 of the Payment Services Regulations 2017 (S.I. 2017/752));”.

5 In paragraph 10V(1) (restriction on proceedings and remedies), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

6 In paragraph 10W(6)(b) (account forfeiture notice), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

7 (1) Paragraph 10Y (lapse of account forfeiture notice) is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (6), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

(3) In sub-paragraph (7)—

- (a) for “If the bank or building society” substitute “If the relevant financial institution”, and
- (b) for “on the bank or building society” substitute “on the institution”.

8 In paragraph 10Z2(7)(a) (forfeiture order), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

9 In Part 6 (interpretation), in paragraph 19(1), at the appropriate places insert—

““electronic money institution” (in Part 4B) has the meaning given by paragraph 10Q(7);”,

““payment institution” (in Part 4B) has the meaning given by paragraph 10Q(7);”, and

““relevant financial institution” (in Part 4B) has the meaning given by paragraph 10Q(1A);”.

Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (c. 29)

10 Part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (civil recovery of the proceeds etc of unlawful conduct) is amended as follows.

11 Chapter 3B (forfeiture of money held in bank and building society accounts) is amended in accordance with paragraphs 12 to 20.

12 In the Chapter heading, for “bank and building society” substitute “certain”.

13 In the italic heading before section 303Z1, for “bank and building society” substitute “certain”.

14 (1) Section 303Z1 (application for account freezing order) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (1), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

(3) After that subsection insert—

“(1A) In this Chapter, “relevant financial institution” means—

- (a) a bank,
- (b) a building society,
- (c) an electronic money institution, or
- (d) a payment institution.”

(4) In subsection (6), at the appropriate places insert—

““electronic money institution” has the same meaning as in the Electronic Money Regulations 2011 (S.I. 2011/99) (see regulation 2 of those Regulations);”, and

““payment institution” means an authorised payment institution or a small payment institution (each as defined in regulation 2 of the Payment Services Regulations 2017 (S.I. 2017/752));”.

15 In section 303Z2(3) (restrictions on making of application under section 303Z1), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

16 In section 303Z6(1), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

17 In section 303Z8(4), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

18 In section 303Z9(6)(b) (account forfeiture notice: England and Wales and Northern Ireland), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

19 (1) Section 303Z11 (lapse of account forfeiture notice) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (6), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

(3) In subsection (7)—

- (a) for “If the bank or building society” substitute “If the relevant financial institution”, and
- (b) for “on the bank or building society” substitute “on the institution”.

20 In section 303Z14(7)(a) (forfeiture order), for “bank or building society” substitute “relevant financial institution”.

21 In section 316(1) (general interpretation of Part 5), at the appropriate places insert—

““electronic money institution” (in Chapter 3B) has the meaning given by section 303Z1(6);”,

““payment institution” (in Chapter 3B) has the meaning given by section 303Z1(6);”, and

““relevant financial institution” (in Chapter 3B) has the meaning given by section 303Z1(1A);”.—
(John Glen.)

This amendment inserts a new Schedule which amends Part 4B of Schedule 1 to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and Chapter 3B of Part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 so that provisions for the freezing and forfeiture of terrorist money and money that is the proceeds of unlawful conduct apply to money held in accounts maintained with electronic money institutions and payment institutions.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Schedule 2

PRUDENTIAL REGULATION OF FCA INVESTMENT FIRMS

Amendments made: 22, page 58, line 31, after “that” insert “—

- (a) is incorporated in the United Kingdom or has its principal place of business in the United Kingdom, and
- (b) ”

This amendment provides that, for the purposes of Part 9C of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, the definition of “authorised parent undertaking” only includes a parent undertaking that is incorporated, or has its principal place of business, in the United Kingdom.

Amendment 23, page 59, line 9, leave out “a place” and insert “its principal place”.

The definition of “non-authorised parent undertaking” in Part 9C of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 refers to an undertaking that is incorporated, or has a place of business, in the United Kingdom. This amendment changes the definition to refer instead to an undertaking’s principal place of business.

Amendment 24, page 60, line 27, at end insert “the following types of prudential requirements”.

This amendment inserts words into section 143D(1) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 for consistency with equivalent wording in section 143C(1).

Amendment 25, page 61, line 36, at end insert—

“(6A) Section 137H (rules about remuneration) applies where the FCA makes rules under subsection (3) prohibiting persons, or persons of a specified description, from being remunerated in a specified way as it applies where the FCA makes general rules imposing such a prohibition.

(6B) Section 137I (Treasury direction to consider compliance with remuneration policies) applies where the FCA makes rules under subsection (3) requiring non-authorised parent undertakings, or non-authorised parent undertakings of a specified description, to act in accordance with a remuneration policy as it applies where the FCA makes general rules imposing such requirements on authorised persons, but as if—

(a) the references in that section to authorised persons were references to non-authorised parent undertakings of FCA investment firms, and

(b) subsection (7) of that section were omitted.”

This amendment provides that sections 137H and 137I of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, which apply where the FCA makes certain general rules about remuneration applying to authorised persons, also apply where the FCA makes equivalent rules relating to non-authorised parent undertakings of FCA investment firms.

Amendment 26, page 62, line 30, after “143D(5)” insert “, (6A), (6B)”.—(*John Glen.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 25.

Amendment proposed: 1, page 63, line 5, at end insert—

“(ba) the target for net UK emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 as set out in the Climate Change Act 2008 as amended by the Climate Change Act (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, and”.—(*Mr McFadden.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 359.

Division No. 196]

[6.23 pm

AYES

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

Champion, Sarah	Healey, rh John
Chapman, Douglas	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Charalambous, Bambos	Hendry, Drew
Cherry, Joanna	Hill, Mike
Clark, Feryal	Hobhouse, Wera
Cooper, Daisy	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cooper, Rosie	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hollern, Kate
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hopkins, Rachel
Cowan, Ronnie	Hosie, Stewart
Coyle, Neil	Howarth, rh Sir George
Crawley, Angela	Huq, Dr Rupa
Creasy, Stella	Hussain, Imran
Cruddas, Jon	Jardine, Christine
Cryer, John	Jarvis, Dan
Cummins, Judith	Johnson, Dame Diana
Cunningham, Alex	Johnson, Kim
Daby, Janet	Jones, Darren
Davey, rh Ed	Jones, Gerald
David, Wayne	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Ruth
Davies-Jones, Alex	Jones, Sarah
Day, Martyn	Kane, Mike
De Cordova, Marsha	Keeley, Barbara
Debonnaire, Thangam	Kendall, Liz
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Khan, Afzal
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Kinnock, Stephen
Dodds, Anneliese	Kyle, Peter
Doogan, Dave	Lake, Ben
Dorans, Allan	Lammy, rh Mr David
Doughty, Stephen	Lavery, Ian
Dowd, Peter	Law, Chris
Dromey, Jack	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Duffield, Rosie	Lewis, Clive
Eagle, Dame Angela	Linden, David
Eagle, Maria	Lloyd, Tony
Eastwood, Colum	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Efford, Clive	Lucas, Caroline
Elliott, Julie	Lynch, Holly
Elmore, Chris	MacAskill, Kenny
Eshalomi, Florence	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Esterson, Bill	Madders, Justin
Evans, Chris	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Farron, Tim	Mahmood, Shabana
Farry, Stephen	Malhotra, Seema
Fellows, Marion	Maskell, Rachael
Fletcher, Colleen	Matheson, Christian
Flynn, Stephen	Mc Nally, John
Fovargue, Yvonne	McCabe, Steve
Foxcroft, Vicky	McCarthy, Kerry
Foy, Mary Kelly	McDonagh, Siobhain
Furniss, Gill	McDonald, Andy
Gardiner, Barry	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Gibson, Patricia	McDonald, Stuart C.
Gill, Preet Kaur	McDonnell, rh John
Glindon, Mary	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Grady, Patrick	McGinn, Conor
Grant, Peter	McGovern, Alison
Gray, Neil	McKinnell, Catherine
Green, Kate	McLaughlin, Anne
Greenwood, Lilian	McMahon, Jim
Greenwood, Margaret	McMorrin, Anna
Griffith, Nia	Mearns, Ian
Gwynne, Andrew	Miliband, rh Edward
Haigh, Louise	Mishra, Navendu
Hamilton, Fabian	Monaghan, Carol
Hanna, Claire	Moran, Layla
Hanvey, Neale	Morden, Jessica
Hardy, Emma	Morgan, Stephen
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Morris, Grahame
Harris, Carolyn	Murray, Ian
Hayes, Helen	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, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 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
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 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 Ayes:

**Matt Western and
 Liz Twist**

NOES

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
 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
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 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
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam

Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishtii, 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 Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 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
 Gray, James
 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
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 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
 Johnston, David
 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

Largan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 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
 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
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 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, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 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
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 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
 Wiggan, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig

Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Michael Tomlinson and
David Rutley

Question accordingly negated.

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

Schedule 3

PRUDENTIAL REGULATION OF CREDIT INSTITUTIONS ETC

Amendments made: 27, page 83, line 34, in schedule 3, at end insert—

5A

“(5A) Section 137H (rules about remuneration) applies where the PRA makes rules under this section prohibiting persons, or persons of a specified description, from being remunerated in a specified way as it applies where the PRA makes general rules imposing such a prohibition.

(5B) Section 137I (Treasury direction to consider compliance with remuneration policies) applies where the PRA makes rules under this section requiring financial holding companies or mixed financial holding companies, or a specified description of such companies, to act in accordance with a remuneration policy as it applies where the PRA makes general rules imposing such requirements on authorised persons, but as if—

(a) the references in that section to authorised persons were references to financial holding companies or mixed financial holding companies, and

(b) subsection (7) of that section were omitted.”

This amendment provides that sections 137H and 137I of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, which apply where the PRA makes certain general rules about remuneration applying to authorised persons, also apply where the PRA makes equivalent rules under section 192XA of that Act.

Amendment 28, page 83, in schedule 3, leave out lines 40 to 42.

This amendment and Amendment 29 omit from section 192XA of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 provision glossing references to instruments made under the capital requirements regulation. That provision will be inserted instead in section 192O of that Act - see Amendment 31. These changes are consequential on Amendment 30.

Amendment 29, page 83, in schedule 3, leave out lines 44 and 45.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 28.

Amendment 30, page 84, line 35, in schedule 3, at end insert—

7A In section 192Y(1) (power to impose penalty or issue censure), for paragraph (d) substitute—

“(d) the capital requirements regulation or an instrument made under that regulation.””

Under section 192Y(1)(d) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, the PRA has power to take disciplinary action where a financial holding company or mixed financial holding company contravenes requirements imposed by some Parts of the Capital Requirements Regulation. This amendment extends the PRA's power to contraventions of requirements imposed by any Part of that Regulation or by instruments made under that Regulation.

Amendment 31, page 85, line 27, in schedule 3, leave out paragraph 13 and insert—

13 (1) Section 192O (interpretation of Part 12B) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (1)—

(a) in the definition of “Directive 2013/36/EU UK law”, omit the words following paragraph (b), and

(b) after that definition insert—

““EU tertiary legislation” has the meaning given in section 20 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018;”.

(3) At the end insert—

(3) In this Part, references to instruments made under the capital requirements regulation include EU tertiary legislation made under that regulation which forms part of retained EU law.”—(*John Glen.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 28.

Third Reading

6.32 pm

John Glen: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I would like to build on what I was saying previously and thank all Members for their examination of this legislation since it was introduced in October. The thoroughness with which right hon. and hon. Members have undertaken this task only serves to underline the significance of the measures included within the Bill and the importance to the UK of the financial services industry.

As I set out on Second Reading, the financial services sector is fundamental to the UK’s economic strength. It contributed nearly £76 billion in tax receipts last year and it supports jobs across the country, two thirds of which are outside London, as well as providing vital services to people and businesses across the United Kingdom.

The Bill represents a key part of our wider approach to financial services regulation now that we have left the EU. Since its introduction, Members have clearly outlined their expectations that the UK maintains its position as a leading centre of global financial services, while also maintaining high regulatory standards and ensuring that the sector serves the needs of the people and businesses of the United Kingdom. I believe that this Bill will make an important contribution to that goal.

Let me briefly reiterate the three themes of the Bill. First, the Bill enhances the UK’s world-leading prudential standards and promotes financial stability through the implementation of a new tailored prudential regime for investment firms and through enabling the implementation of the Basel III standards. The Bill will also ensure that the FCA has appropriate powers to manage an orderly transition away from the LIBOR benchmark, providing stability and clarity for financial markets.

Secondly, the Bill promotes openness between the UK and international markets by simplifying the process for marketing overseas investment funds in the UK and by delivering on our commitment to provide long-term access between the UK and Gibraltar for financial services firms.

Finally, the Bill supports the maintenance of an effective financial services regulatory framework and sound capital markets. It does this through a range of measures, such as improving the functioning of the packaged retail and insurance-based investment products regulation and increasing penalties for market abuse.

As I said earlier, this is an important Bill. It is also a very technical one, so let me once more thank hon. Members for their valuable and insightful contributions to the scrutiny of this Bill at each stage of its passage. As I indicated earlier, it is important to note that this Bill marks the beginning of a process. It represents a necessary first step towards maintaining high standards and protecting financial stability now that we have left the European Union and the transition period has ended. The Bill is also a foundation for our wider vision for financial services in this country, as the Chancellor set out to this House in his speech on 9 November 2020.

Much of the future of UK financial services regulation will be the continuation of work we led while we were a member of the EU, and I reaffirm this Government’s commitment to the highest internationally agreed standards, which we recognise as a cornerstone of the industry’s reputation and success.

Although we remain committed to those standards, it is important to acknowledge that there are areas in which we will forge our own path and establish an approach better suited to the unique nature of the UK market. Having left and reached an agreement with the EU on the nature of our future relationship, the UK must now have the confidence to regulate our financial services sector in a way that works for us and best meets our needs and our constituents’ needs.

This Bill provides continuity and certainty to the UK financial services sector, demonstrating to it that the UK remains an attractive and stable environment for its global business.

6.37 pm

Mr McFadden: I will not detain the House for very long. As this is my last contribution to the debate on this Bill, I begin by thanking the Minister and his Bill team for their patience and forbearance throughout our proceedings—it feels like we have been dealing with this for a few months now. I also thank the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who has gone through the Bill assiduously and tabled many amendments.

I thank the Clerks in the Public Bill Office, Kevin and Nick, for helping us. They play a particularly important role in helping Opposition Members to draft and discuss amendments. The ideas are our responsibility, but they give us very good and important technical advice.

I thank the Committee Chairs, the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), and all the Members who have taken part in the debates, tabled amendments or spoken in any way. I make particular mention of my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle), whom I congratulate on her recently awarded damehood. Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank you and your colleagues in the Chair.

We have not opposed the principle of the Bill, and we will not vote against Third Reading tonight, because we recognise the need for post-Brexit stability in regulation. We also recognise that this is possibly the first of a number of pieces of legislation of this type. We have sought to improve the Bill in various ways, either in Committee or today on Report.

[Mr McFadden]

With the exception of the FinTech and financial crime amendment, the Minister has been, for the most part, resistant to these amendments, but a number of key issues have been raised. I hope that he and the Treasury will consider the broad sweep of issues raised around things such as: crime and money laundering because there is a real desire in this Parliament not to see our financial sector being regarded as an easy place for those things to happen; consumer debt and protection, as Members have voiced quite passionate concerns, particularly given the year that we have just been through and the impact on household finances, that consumers are given help with what for many is a growing debt burden, and protection against mis-selling or inappropriate treatment by financial services providers or companies; mortgage prisoners, whom we have heard about tonight, and many of whom are locked into very difficult and disadvantageous mortgage products; and the broader issues that we have raised about post-Brexit financial services, equivalence, green finance and so on.

The Government made a big decision—a big choice—particularly in their reincarnation, or incarnation, since December 2019: to place the issue of sovereignty above considerations of market access. We might go further and say that they chose to place the issue of sovereignty above considerations of economic prosperity, although perhaps Ministers and Members abroad would contest that. None the less, a choice like that was certainly made and it has big implications, potentially, for a sector that contributes a significant proportion of our GDP, employs around one in 14 people in the country, earns a lot of export revenues for the country, and is a very significant contributor to tax revenues that pay for public services. We all have a great deal of interest in how this sector will be run as we have come to the end of the transition period. As I said earlier, we want this sector to be successful, to be innovative, and also to be responsible.

We want to ensure that the sector does well, but also that the public is properly protected against the risks inherent in an economy like ours, having such a globally significant financial services sector, and the risks if things go wrong, which we saw in our recent history. We certainly do not want to see a slash-and-burn approach to regulation in order to compensate for the decision—I stress the word “decision”—to lose at least a proportion of the market on our doorstep. It is in that spirit that we have approached the Bill, that we have tabled the amendments, and that we have chosen the amendments that we have put to the vote. Thank you.

6.42 pm

Alison Thewliss [V]: I just want to reflect on the Bill and on where we are. There was a lot of cross-party agreement in Committee and in today’s debate on actions that we want to see. We all agree on the importance of financial services to our economy. We all agree that there needs to be further action by Government on money laundering, fraud and economic crime. We all agree that we want to protect customers, businesses and our constituents from emerging threats and risks. I think that we are getting to a broader agreement on scrutiny as well. I urge the Minister to recognise that putting the scrutiny in place after the framework and

the rules are made fails to meet the Government’s promise of taking back control and of giving powers to this House. If we are taking these powers back from Europe, they should be coming to the House of Commons rather than to bureaucrats elsewhere. We have less power in this House as Members of Parliament than the Members of the European Parliament have, and that is very difficult to understand and accept from a Government who made such a great play of this.

I want to take the opportunity also to thank everybody who has helped and supported me in these debates and in the Bill process generally. I want to thank the Minister and the shadow Minister for the spirit in which our debate has been conducted, and all the Members who have contributed their expertise to the debates we have had—there is significant expertise in the House, which should be lent to scrutiny.

I thank the Clerks, Nicholas Taylor and Kevin Maddison, for the significant advice they have given. I thank Scott Taylor, Linda Nagy and my member of staff Mhairi Love, all of whom supported us greatly in the research that went into this. I particularly thank Macmillan Cancer Support and all who gave evidence on the Bill. It was so good to be on a Bill Committee that was allowed to take evidence, which does not happen for the Finance Bill, and I urge the Minister to take that on board when we come back to the Finance Bill later this year. Lastly, I thank Heather Buchanan of the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking for helping me understand some of the issues in the Bill.

There is a lot yet to be said and done on financial services; this is only the beginning. It is incumbent on the Government, in the areas where there is cross-party agreement, to take on the measures that have been suggested and to deal swiftly with the risks that we see coming, so that we can all ensure that our constituents and businesses have the protection they need to participate in financial services and the fairest possible deal in the years and months ahead.

6.45 pm

Christine Jardine [V]: Like other Members, I would like to reiterate my and my party’s support for the financial services sector and its importance to our economy, making up about 7% of GDP. There has been a lot of cross-party agreement on this in Parliament. I hope the Government recognise that it is incumbent on them to take on board the comments from the Liberal Democrats, the Labour party and the Scottish National party. There is a great deal of work still to be done to protect consumers from unscrupulous operators, and this will be vital not only to our economic recovery, but to the future shape of the United Kingdom’s economy once we recover from covid-19.

6.46 pm

Jim Shannon: Unfortunately I did not get the opportunity to speak on Report, but I want to put on record my thanks to the Minister for the prompt responses that he gives us on the matters that we bring to his attention. I believe that the Bill is a step in the right direction—it cements some of the issues that I would have liked to speak about earlier, which other Members have touched on—but there is still much to do. The Minister knows that, and we look forward to working with him.

The Minister talked about how imperative our financial services are, and said that we can continue to be the core of financial services in Europe; I hope we can. As we leave the EU, I hope that the financial services industry can attain the highest standards and that we have protections for consumers individually and collectively. I am a person who uses a chequebook and has access to cash, because that is the way that the Northern Ireland man and woman did things over the years. I understand that the Bill puts in place protections for credit cards and so on, but sometimes credit cards do not work; sometimes the system breaks. Those of us of a different generation and with a different way of doing things need reassurance that we can have access to cash if we need it and that chequebooks will be available.

The Bill provides protection for small and medium-sized businesses. I have expressed concern that the FCA rules do not protect small businesses in the way they should, and I hope the Bill can do that. Over the years, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) has been at the forefront of this issue. He and I have worked together, and with others, to make sure that small businesses are protected from any breach of FCA rules. I also understand his wanting to ensure that multinationals pay their fair share of tax to the UK, instead of hiving it off to tax havens. I hope that, through the Bill, in the future we will see more accountability in the process of ensuring that that takes place.

I am also very much for ensuring consumer protection by introducing ideas of fairness and legality, and I believe that the Minister is very keen to ensure that that happens. However, the individual consumer has no resources for court cases, whereas big business seems to have all the resources, so we probably need something in there for the small man and woman, whom I always speak up for—we all do; I am not the only one.

I listened to the Minister earlier on money laundering, and particularly on his point about paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. He said he would come back and give me some details. I hope that, through the Bill, when we try to address money laundering—the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) referred to this—we do not miss another opportunity to ensure that gangsters, thugs and paramilitaries are put out of business, as they should be.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motions in the name of the Leader of the House relating to Sittings in Westminster Hall (Suspension) (No. 2) and Business of the House (Private Members' Bills) (No. 9) (if not previously concluded) one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; the business may be proceeded with, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Eddie Hughes.*)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The House now stands suspended for the fumigation—that is not the right word, I know, but the cleansing of the Dispatch Boxes, and for Members to leave and others to come in a safe, covid-friendly manner.

6.51 pm

Sitting suspended.

Sittings in Westminster Hall (Suspension) (No. 2)

6.55 pm

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Minister, I must inform the House that I have selected amendment (a) to motion 4 in the name of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) and others, and amendment (a) to motion 5 in the name of the same hon. Members. The amendments will be debated together with the main motions, and the Questions necessary to dispose of the motions will be put at the end of the debate. Just before I call the Minister to move the motion, I must point out to everyone that there are a number of speakers, so please do not hog the time. I am not going to put a time limit on, but let us see if we can help each other.

6.56 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I beg to move motion 4,

That, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) and the order of this House on 23 September 2020, there shall be no sittings in Westminster Hall with effect from Thursday 14 January until the House otherwise orders.

Mr Speaker: With this we will consider the following:

Amendment (a) to motion 4, to leave out from “until” to end and insert “Monday 22 February”.

Motion 5—*Business of the House (Private Members’ Bills) (No. 9)*—

That the Order of the House of 16 January 2020 (Business of the House (Private Members’ Bills)), as amended by the Orders of the House of 25 March, 22 April, 12 May, 10 June, 1 July, 3 November and 30 December 2020, is further amended as follows: leave out “15 January 2021, 22 January 2021, 29 January 2021, 5 February 2021, 26 February 2021, 5 March 2021, 12 March 2021 and 26 March 2021”.

Amendment (a) to motion 5, to leave out from “leave out ‘15 January 2021’” to end and insert:

“() The Orders for Second Reading of Bills and for subsequent stages having precedence in accordance with Standing Order No. 14(9) on each of the days listed under Day 1 in the table below are read and discharged.

() Each such Bill is ordered to be read a second time or to be set down for the relevant stage on the corresponding day listed under Day 2 in the table; and

() Those Bills are so set down on the appropriate Day 2 in the order in which they were so set down on the corresponding Day 1.

Day 1	Day 2
15 January 2021	26 February 2021
22 January 2021	5 March 2021
29 January 2021	12 March 2021
5 February 2021	19 March 2021
26 February 2021	26 March 2021
5 March 2021	16 April 2021
12 March 2021	23 April 2021
26 March 2021	30 April 2021”.

Mr Rees-Mogg: There are a number of Members on the call list, and it is important that we are able to hear from them. I therefore intend, perhaps uncharacteristically, to keep my opening remarks succinct. I have brought

forward these motions reluctantly, following representations made to me from across the House. I want to be clear to hon. and right hon. Members that I do not believe it would be right for me to bring forward unilaterally these sorts of restrictions to our business without there being requests to do so. The matter was discussed at length by the House of Commons Commission on Monday, and I do not think there can be any misunderstanding of the view of members of the Commission, including those from Opposition parties, that these motions should be brought to the House, although this is a matter for the House and not for the Commission. I understand that there will be some disappointment about the effect of these motions, but I hope that all sides can support them today, in view of the current circumstances.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): This issue was briefly discussed when the House was recalled last week, and we talked about the option of keeping Westminster Hall functioning virtually and broadcasting it. The Leader of the House said that there would be a cost involved, but would the Government support that? I know that many Members would prefer that option to shutting down Westminster Hall completely.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who makes an important point. There are questions of cost, of the resources of the broadcasting team, which is working across both Houses and is a very small team, and of cost-effectiveness, because we do not know how long this restriction will last. It is my hope that it will not last enormously long. The Government are certainly open to maintaining conversations with the House authorities about that practicality, and considering it if it would be practical.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I welcome the tone that the Leader of the House is taking and the fact that he is being open-minded, but may I ask him to go just a little step further and be open-minded on the reintroduction of electronic voting? The reason why my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) and I are here this week is that if there is a vote, we are required to have tellers here. The Scottish National party does not have the luxury of having Members of Parliament living in London, and it is not easy for us to just pop along and cast a proxy vote. So if the Leader of the House is being open-minded, can he be open-minded about reintroducing remote voting?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman knows that is not the matter of today’s debate.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Leader of the House for what he is saying. As one who, with others, attends Westminster Hall on a regular basis, I know that it is important to have that scrutiny of Ministers there. As far as I am aware, the Leader of the House does not seem to have put a timescale on its return. Does he not feel, as some in the House do, that it is better to have a timescale—until the February recess, for instance—so that we can work towards that? The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) comes from Scotland; my journey over here takes about four hours—

Mr Speaker: Order. We have to remember that there are people on the speaking list. If we are going to have interventions, they have to be short, and they have to be relevant to what we are discussing.

To help the Leader of the House, I would say that there are proposals to look at other rooms, but it will take three to four weeks to get that ready. That is now consistently being looked at—especially if the order goes through tonight—in order to make it happen and to try to ensure that we have a real proposal to take forward.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for his intervention. I made it clear in my opening remarks that I am very reluctant to remove this scrutiny. Scrutiny is important not just because it is the right of Members to hold the Government to account, but because it leads to better government. Scrutiny of the Government's ideas and processes, and seeking redress of grievance, help our constituents, so I would not have brought forward these motions had there not been a widespread appeal for them.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): My right hon. Friend indicated that Opposition Members on the Commission were keen for this eventuality to come to pass. Is he suggesting that the Opposition do not want to scrutinise the Government?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very reluctant to try to make party political capital out of this. I think everybody is behaving in a serious-minded manner to ensure that the House is as covid-secure as it can be and that, under the exceptional circumstances, we carry out our business to the extent that we can but put limitations on it where that is prudent, so I do not wish to seek to cast aspersions or blame.

These motions reflect the reality of the current lockdown and the desire to limit physical attendance on the estate, in line with the current covid guidance. They also reflect the necessary focus on ensuring that the business in the Chamber is prioritised, particularly now that Members are able to participate remotely in substantive proceedings.

To come back to the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford, I do understand the reasons for the amendments tabled to these two motions, but I would ask that the House agree to the motions as tabled. However—I underline this—I commit myself to ensuring that a motion is brought forward to reopen Westminster Hall and to bring back sitting Fridays at the earliest opportunity, when it is both possible and practicable.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I have a private Member's Bill that is all ready to go into Committee. The Bill saves a great deal of taxpayers' money, it is very good for our constituents and it is supported across the House, all the Members from across the House who have generously volunteered to serve on the Committee are ready, and it has gone to the Committee of Selection. If the Committee of Selection were to approve that next Wednesday, would it be possible for the Bill Committee to meet, albeit briefly, on 27 January?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I understand it—though it may be better to seek wise clerical advice on this point—if the Committee of Selection were to approve members for the Committee, the Committee could go ahead, and then my right hon. Friend's Bill would be ready for the

point at which we bring back sitting Fridays, which, as I said, I look forward to doing at the earliest opportunity, when it is possible and practicable.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thought I had almost finished, but I would never refuse to give way to my hon. Friend.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am very grateful. My right hon. Friend says that he is committed to coming back with proposals as soon as practicable. If we passed the amendments tonight, they would ensure that his will prevailed until after half-term, and then after half-term there would have to be a fresh look at these issues. Does he not agree with that?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think my hon. Friend is saying, "Not my will but thy will be done"—essentially, that is his point—but I think the commitment is a sensible one. There is limited time, and therefore we should bring back something when we can actually do it rather than going through the motions again and again. That is why we have not reset dates for private Members' Bills on Fridays, because we have reset dates now several times, and we have found that we have had to re-reset dates because, when we got to the new dates, it has turned out not to be practical to sit. Therefore, I think this is the most sensible way of doing it, but I reiterate my reluctance. This place is here to scrutinise, to hold to account and to ensure that our constituents are represented. Anything that reduces scrutiny is something that no Leader of the House should ever wish to do.

Mr Harper: Mr Speaker, I listened carefully to what you said. This is intended to be helpful. Given that the Leader of the House made a clear commitment to come back to the House at the earliest opportunity, and that, listening carefully to what you said from the Chair, I heard you say that broadcasting proposals would be worked up and ready in approximately four weeks, those commitments certainly satisfy me. I trust your word and the word of the Leader of the House that we will be able have another look at this in four weeks' time. I hope that you and the Leader of the House feel that that was a helpful point to make.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I now commend my motions to the House.

7.6 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for bringing forward these motions. I will speak to the motions and against the amendments. We are debating them against a background, as at 12 January, of more than 83,000 deaths. We should think about Wembley stadium—all the people who have died would fill it. Yesterday, there were 1,243 deaths, which is the second-highest number of fatalities reported on a single day. That is the background to why we are debating these motions and to why Mr Speaker has changed the arrangements in the House. Everyone has seen where the Dispatch Box has been moved to. This is a serious situation. This is not business as usual. This is not normal business.

[Valerie Vaz]

In the Commission, we expressed our views on all sides—everybody expressed their views. We heard from Public Health England, and it is fair to say that PHE was so concerned about what was happening on the estate and the number of people who were coming that, before Christmas, it was ready to close us down. We resisted that because we want to hold the Government to account. Believe me that, more than anyone else, the Opposition want to hold the Government to account.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this place functions not just because we turn up, but because of all the staff who work so hard here to actually make it happen? We need to think about them and not just ourselves.

Valerie Vaz: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments; I was just coming to that.

We have to do everything we can to keep people safe. In the Commission, we tasked the usual channels and the business managers to come up with a package. This place operates because we trust each other and the three Chief Whips work well together and allow business to take place. We sent them away and they came up with the package that is before the House, which the Leader of the House has put forward.

The Leader of the House has previously mentioned that Westminster Hall would cost £100,000. I say to the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), who mentioned that, that I have also spoken to the Broadcasting Unit, because we are very keen to have Westminster Hall debates, as are all hon. Members. It is working on it as we speak. It has given us a timeframe of four weeks because that gives it an opportunity to do that. It said that Westminster Hall is so badly set out that it is looking at other arrangements, and it is looking at them as we speak. It said that, as a result of that, the costs will be less, so we will be able to have Westminster Hall debates and we will be able to hold the Government to account, if the Government will only answer the questions carefully.

Let us look at what the Government have done in terms of the amount of money that they have spent on private consultants—£375 million. Given that, £100,000 or less is easily doable. There was £40,000 for a pay rise for a very special adviser; I am sure there will be savings from the fact that he has now left his job.

We are trying to facilitate full parliamentary scrutiny, which is essential to our democracy. It is slightly strange that the Leader of the House has allowed virtual participation in private Members' Bills; I will deal with that in a second. Hon. Members will know that to have a closure motion, 100 right hon. and hon. Members need to come down here. We want to support our colleagues, but we do not want to make people unsafe. I do not want to say this, but a really serious incident happened today. Many hon. Members know about it, and it is frankly shocking. It is the death of a person who worked on the estate, and we send our condolences to his family. It is covid related, and I am sure we will look at that.

We have the bizarre situation where Members have to come down here for a closure motion, and yet we can take part virtually. The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone)—I am not sure whether he is here; he might

even be taking part virtually—[*Interruption.*] There we are. He is dealing with the situation as it arises. Labour's position is that we want remote voting. In that way, private Member's Bills can take place because hon. Members can vote remotely.

I hope that the Broadcasting Unit will continue to look at the hybrid preparations for Westminster Hall. As I said, this package was agreed by the business managers whom we entrusted to deal with this to keep people safe. What is the slogan that the Government are using? Protect the NHS, and save the lives of other people—not just the lives of hon. Members, but those of the people who work here and facilitate our democracy. Labour supports the motion.

7.11 pm

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con) [V]: I address you from a very misty Staffordshire Moorlands today, Mr Speaker. May I thank the Leader of the House for the opportunity to have this debate, and for his tone? He struck exactly the right note in showing his reluctance to introduce these measures, as well as his willingness to consider other options. Many members of the Procedure Committee will welcome that tone, and the commitment that he has given to addressing this issue and getting Westminster Hall debates, and similar debates, back as soon as possible.

These debates are important. They are important to our constituents. The most watched parts of Parliament after Prime Minister's questions are the debates on petitions on a Monday evening, and I am sure that over the past few weeks, many Members have been implored by their constituents to attend those debates in Westminster Hall. Space has simply not allowed us all to be there, but it shows how important those debates are. The Chair of the Petitions Committee will be speaking later in this debate, as will the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, who is keen to ensure that there is time for the debates that that Committee has lined up, and that Members desperately want to discuss.

The Procedure Committee wants to consider the situation carefully. None of us wanted to be in this situation or for this to happen, and we would have preferred to continue with the debates. Over the next few weeks we are keen to support the Leader of the House, as well as you, Mr Speaker, and the House Commission, in finding ways to make this work. Where there's a will there's a way, and I welcome what you said, Mr Speaker, about using alternative facilities. There are rooms that could be used, perhaps with some imaginative thinking about the use of the Chamber, or using Chamber time to accommodate more Back-Bench debates, petitions debates, and other debates that are important to us as Members of Parliament.

A point raised earlier was about taking evidence in Bill Committees. Because Bill Committees are sitting physically, their members have to turn up in person to meet. The evidence sessions are virtual, however, although members of the Committee are expected to turn up physically to listen to them. Could the Leader of the House, and others, look at whether an exception could be made to avoid members of Bill Committees having to travel to Westminster for an extra two days—or possibly more—in order to take evidence, all of which will be given virtually?

On private Members' Bills, I listened to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) said. Many representations have also been made to me by Members who have private Members' Bills that are about to go to the other place and just need that final nod through; the Government have given the money resolution and they are all ready to go, but they are now just waiting. They are good Bills that we know the Government want to see go through, so I wonder again whether the Leader of the House could consider finding a way to get them to the other place as soon as possible.

I am now going to disappoint my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). I told him earlier that I was going to support his amendments. However, having listened to all that the Leader of the House has said, I take his assurance at face value; he has given me his word. On that basis, I am happy not to support the amendments and to support the Government in this case. We have found ourselves in a dreadful situation and none of us wants to be here, but let us all do our bit to be role models, to lead our constituents and to show them the right way to behave in this situation.

7.15 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP) [V]: We shall be supporting both motions on the Order Paper tonight. Given the rising infection rates and the fact that our national health service is on the verge of being overwhelmed, it would be irresponsible not to support any and all measures that limit physical interaction in this place. We have a duty of care not just to Members, but to the staff who work in the Palace to ensure that their health is protected. I think we also have something of an obligation to lead by example when it comes to enduring some inconveniences ourselves, when we are asking people throughout our countries to endure much more severe privations.

I have two questions tonight. First, do the measures go far enough in limiting physical contact? Secondly, are we making enough use of the technological alternatives to physical meetings? I think that the answer to the first of those questions is no; there is more that we could do. I honestly believe that there is nothing that we need to do in terms of fulfilling our legal and democratic mandates that requires our physical presence in this place, and that it would be possible to have all our proceedings conducted online. I know that that is a step way too far for many people in the House, and perhaps in the Chamber tonight, but there are steps that we could take along the way to that.

We could limit the amount of time that was spent in the Chamber, perhaps by looking at a two or three-day week. As the Chair of the Procedure Committee has just said, we could certainly ensure that all Committee meetings, including Delegated Legislation Committees and Bill Committees, were able to meet virtually. As other Members have said, we could also switch back on the remote voting system so that people were not required physically to be present in order to discharge proxy votes.

As to the question of whether technological alternatives are being deployed enough, again, I do not think that they are; more could be done. I say that in no way as a criticism of the efficient and effective staff working in our digital services and broadcasting departments, but I

think that the context that we have given them to work with is not sufficient. I honestly believe that we are looking at this through the wrong end of the telescope. In most of these discussions, we talk about virtual proceedings as an adjunct—an add-on—to the physical meeting, not as an alternative to it. Therefore, we are concerned to find a space that is safe or which can be made safe for a physical meeting, and we then deploy the technology to allow others to join remotely.

Another way—a better way—of doing it would be to move the entire meeting on to the virtual sphere. If we were committed to doing that, we could bring back Westminster Hall debates much sooner. It is not as good, Mr Speaker. I am looking at a white dot in the middle of my computer and trying to imagine that I am having a discussion with other human beings. It feels extremely strange, but it is better than nothing, and it is better than putting our health and the health of others at risk.

I implore and beseech the Leader of the House, the Government and those responsible for this to stop looking at these debates in such a last-century fashion, to come up to date by taking a more modern, imaginative and creative approach, and to deploy the technology fully, so that we are able to conduct our business of democratic scrutiny and not see that compromise, but without the need to meet physically and therefore to spread this contagion.

7.19 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): May I first thank you, Mr Speaker, for selecting the two amendments in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and for facilitating this debate? It is a pity, in my view, that this debate was not volunteered by the Government and that it had to be forced on them by us objecting to the motions that were put down on the Order Paper for yesterday. One consequence of that is that at least we were able to have debates in Westminster Hall today, which otherwise would have been curtailed by the Government.

This is an important issue because we are talking principally about Back-Bench scrutiny. The Leader of the House, in his opening remarks, which I thought were very reasonable, said that he recognised the importance of Back-Bench scrutiny. What we have on the Order Paper at the moment is a proposal that will remove 21 hours a week of scrutiny of the Government—16 hours in Westminster Hall and five hours in private Members' Bills each week. My right hon. Friend is reluctant to do that and he has said that he will come back to the House as soon as he can to bring forward alternative proposals. What I would like him to do tonight is guarantee that the Standing Order that requires that there should be 13 sitting Fridays where private Members' business takes precedence will be complied with in any event in this Session, and that if it cannot be complied with in this Session, the Government will honour the spirit of the Standing Order and allow for the carry-over of those Bills that are set down for days that cannot be used.

If my right hon. Friend gives me that guarantee, in a sense it will negate the need for amendment (a) to the second motion, because that amendment is designed to ensure that we can carry on with private Members' Bills between the period after half-term and the end of April,

[Sir Christopher Chope]

and it is modelled on the previous motions brought forward by him, most recently on 30 December, when he arranged for the Friday sitting scheduled for 8 January to be moved to 15 January. That system was working perfectly all right and my question is, why, in one week, has it not been possible to replicate the same motions that were put forward previously?

The Prime Minister said today that he will be reviewing, for example, what happens in our schools after half-term. Surely it is appropriate that we should, in any event, have a guarantee that these issues will be revisited by the Leader of the House after half-term. We are talking about no fewer than 151 private Members' Bills. I have received stick from the Government and colleagues in the past for having insisted that individual private Members' Bills are debated, but never did I think I would be in the Chamber when the Government put down on the Order Paper a proposal that has the effect for the time being—unless it is ever amended—of depriving 151 private Members' Bills of any opportunity to be heard and discussed in this Chamber.

I wait to hear from my right hon. Friend—I am happy for him to intervene to give me this guarantee, because I am concerned that we will get to the end of this debate and there will not be an opportunity for him to respond, and this question will go unanswered. I hope that it will not.

Mr Speaker: I might be able to help to reassure the hon. Gentleman on that, because I will be bringing the Leader of the House in at 7.50 pm, so whoever may be speaking I would expect to sit down. Let us go to the Chair of the Petitions Committee, Catherine McKinnell.

7.23 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: The public health situation in the capital and across the country is extremely worrying, and it is vital that the House ensures that Members and staff are working in the safest possible conditions. However, this eventuality should have been planned for before now, because the Government's plan to close Westminster Hall without an alternative is not just taking away our ability to hold debates, but reducing the opportunities for members of the public—our constituents—to engage with Parliament.

Already in this Parliament, around 11 million people have signed a parliamentary petition, but the public are once again seeing the space for their debates being shut down. On Monday I led a debate on support for the hospitality industry, following a petition that got more than 200,000 signatures, and I heard from many hon. Members that they cared deeply about the subject and knew their constituents did, but felt they could not travel down from their constituency to Westminster to take part. Last week my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House asked—this was mentioned earlier—about hybrid proceedings in Westminster Hall, and the Leader of the House said that the potential £100,000 cost was too high for the Government to consider. Perhaps we now have an answer to the question, "What price democracy?"

But where there is a will there is a way; and when Westminster Hall closed in March, the Petitions Committee innovated. We held one-off sessions and inquiries. We undertook a huge range of online public engagement. We held our own hybrid e-petition sessions, allowing Members to contribute in lieu of the debates we would have liked to have. For some shielding Members, it was actually the first time that they were able to contribute substantively to a Backbench Business debate since the first lockdown began.

Those innovations, however, cannot be a substitute for the proper parliamentary debates that I know we want to see. Hybrid debates may not be perfect, but surely the Leader of the House, who I know considers himself a champion of Parliament, would accept that some form of debate taking place safely, either in hybrid form or entirely virtually, is better than no debates at all. So, since Westminster Hall reopened in October, the Petitions Committee has held 22 debates, covering 37 petitions, signed by over 7 million people. Thirty-three petitions are awaiting debate and the number is growing every week; they share more than 6 million signatures. Petitions debates since March have been viewed more than a million times and are some of the most-read debates in *Hansard*, and the Backbench Business Committee also currently has at least 12 debates that it wants to schedule.

The closure of Westminster Hall without an alternative prevents both our Committees from scheduling any of our debates, and so for petitioners, for Back Benchers and for the good of debate, which is vital to our democracy and the good functioning of government, I urge the Leader of the House to urgently bring forward a motion to ensure a hybrid Westminster Hall, whether in the existing hall or in a new location, so that that can come into effect as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: I just want to say that the decision on spending the money is for the House Service; it is not a Government decision.

7.27 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) [V]: It is a great pleasure to follow the Chairwoman of the Petitions Committee, and I agree with her entirely in her desire to have hybrid proceedings in Westminster Hall. I also support what has already been mentioned on remote voting, because that improves the democratic process—it is an improvement on having the Deputy Chief Whips walking through the Lobbies with hundreds of votes stuffed in their pockets.

In the short time that I have, I want to talk about private Members' Bills. The Standing Orders are the bible of the House of Commons. Without Standing Orders, the Government could ride roughshod over the democratic process. I fear that today, that is what is proposed. If the motion goes through unamended, it is effectively abolishing private Members' Bills for this Session, because there will be no way to get 13 sitting Fridays in before the end of the Session. The Session has already gone on for over a year, and it would mean the abolition of private Members' Bills.

Many may say that does not matter; I think it does. I think the ability of private Members—Back-Bench Members—to bring in private Members' Bills is an important part of our democratic process. That is the only time that it is possible to get legislation through the

House that was not introduced by the Government. People may say, “That never happens.” Well, let us have a look at the last Session. Sixteen private Members’ Bills completed the statutory process and became Acts of Parliament, including the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018; the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018; and the Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Act 2018, which was in fact taken through the House by me. All were important Bills that became Acts of Parliament.

Of course, there are also nationally important measures. I might consider the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019 to be an infamous Act of Parliament, but it was passed and eventually led to a general election. In fact, it led to a proper Brexit, which probably was not what the proposers of that Bill wanted. Nevertheless, such Bills are definitely important parts of our democratic process.

The last time that a Government tried to abolish private Member’s Bills was when the Labour Government tried in 1945. I have listened to the arguments quite rightly put forward about the dangers of participation, and about the fact that we are in a covid pandemic and therefore we should put off private Members’ Bills days and Westminster Hall debates. The amendments tabled to the motions we are debating do just that—they stop private Members’ Bills days and Westminster Hall debates in their tracks—but they also require them to be looked at again by the Government and this House after the February half-term. I think that is the right way forward. It gives the Government exactly what it wants—in fact, it is in line with what the Leader of the House has said today. I cannot understand why there is this blanket abolition of private Members’ Bills days when we could bring them back after the February break. If they needed to be changed then, we could of course look at the matter again at that time.

I think this is an attack on democracy, and in particular an attack on Parliament. I looked back to what happened in 1945. Sir Alan Patrick Herbert was the Member for Oxford University and a great parliamentarian who loved the House of Commons—in fact, he was rather like my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). The last time that a similar motion was brought to the House—the debate then was titled “Business And Sittings Of The House”—he concluded his speech by saying something that I find has stood the test of time:

“I have a Bill here dealing with the provision of legal aid and assistance for the poor. That is something fundamental, but there is not a word about it in the Gracious Speech. What am I to say to all those people who write to me? I must tell them to stop sending their letters and to save their stamps, because I can do no more to help them if this Motion goes through; I might just as well be a Member of the German Reichstag or a stuffed exhibit in the Natural History Museum. If the House will not have my Bills on the Table I cast them on the Floor, as a monument to Parliamentary liberty and a challenge to despotic power.”—[*Official Report*, 16 August 1945; Vol. 413, c. 144.]

I can do no more than the same.

7.32 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) [V]: That is an act to follow.

We are now in the third lockdown. Throughout this pandemic, the Government’s response to covid has been slow, half-hearted and littered with U-turns and

contradictions. The way we operate here in Parliament is no exception. It has never been a question of whether something is technically possible; it has been a question of whether there is the political will to embrace new working practices, respond adequately to the health emergency and spend the adequate resources to be fully inclusive.

I want to say a special thank you to the staff of the House who, whatever has been asked of them, have delivered the technical and clerical solutions. Virtual participation in this Chamber and in most Committees has been made possible, and even remote voting went live as early as last May.

It is the retrograde attitude of this Government’s Ministers that has hampered progress, failed to be fair and inclusive, and failed to set an example to the public. Time and again I have asked the Leader of the House to reinstate remote voting and make virtual participation possible across the board. We were told that we could not have remote Westminster Hall debates because the technical adaptation was too resource intensive. Westminster Hall debates, as an important part of our parliamentary democracy, were used as an example of why we could not have a fully virtual Parliament, and since we had to be in Parliament for Westminster Hall debates, we might as well be there for voting.

In his recent response to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), the Leader of the House wrote that parliamentary resources were finite and that making Westminster Hall debates fit for virtual participation would require extra resources—but what kind of an argument is that when we have already spent £40,000 of public funds on making remote voting possible without making use of it? Is it the money, is it democracy, or is it the lack of political will? The possibility of moving Westminster Hall debates to a bigger Committee Room is welcome, but the question remains: why is this being considered only now, after so many MPs were excluded from participation? For example, I wanted to take part in the Westminster Hall debate on the hospitality sector, but I am staying here in Bath for public health reasons. Why would it still take four weeks to make Westminster Hall debates fully virtual?

If the Government are so concerned about democracy, why are they proposing to suspend private Member’s Bill procedures? As the MP who successfully made upskirting a specific criminal offence, which started as a private Member’s Bill, I can vouch for the enormous contribution that private Members’ Bills make to our democracy. This suspension is unjustified. Anything we do here in Parliament could be done virtually. It is not the technical side that is the problem but the political will of this Government. I support the proposals, but I think we could go a lot further.

7.36 pm

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Many people will, quite rightly, hold the Government to account for their handling of the covid pandemic, but many in this House perhaps fail to hold themselves to account for not holding the Government to account. This House is at its worst when we talk about ourselves, which is all that we have done this evening. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) talked a great deal of sense: we are not here to speak for

[Mr William Wragg]

ourselves but to speak on behalf of our constituents. That should be at the forefront of our minds in every single proceeding, whether in this Chamber or indeed in Westminster Hall. While I will not match the theatrics of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) in my brief remarks, I agree with him entirely.

We are in a grave public health emergency. No one can doubt that; the figures today prove it. But let us have regard for our constituents, who, day in, day out, turn up diligently to work in supermarkets, attend upon those who are vulnerable in their homes, or go about their business because they have no other option. What example do we set for them? I suggest it is a poor one, because we have taken many measures in this House to be covid-secure—quite frankly, going above and beyond, and rightly so, to be an exemplar of covid security.

The virtual Parliament is virtually nothing. It consists of a series of disjointed monologues set against a variety of backgrounds. Scrutiny of the Government is the duty of every single Member of this House, regardless of the party to which they belong. I fear that in debates such as this and proposals contained therein, we have singularly failed in that.

7.38 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD) [V]: This debate has clearly demonstrated the value of Westminster Hall debates and private Members' Bills for very many Members on both sides of the House, and, most importantly, for the constituents we represent. They allow Back-Bench Members to make their own contributions and advocate for specific topics on behalf of those constituents, as well as helping to shine a light on issues on which the Government would not usually be held to account.

Like other speakers in this debate, I would like to see Westminster Hall become fully virtual, allowing all Members to take part. I understand the broadcast capability constraints that have been reported previously, but I wonder whether an option might be to facilitate virtual participation in Westminster Hall and to record those sessions for later uploading and access by members of the public on the parliamentlive.tv site rather than via live broadcast.

During the autumn, before the Westminster Hall debates were back up and running, the Petitions Committee ran a series of Westminster Hall-style virtual debates that were accessible to those who had not been able to attend the House in person. They were invaluable to many of those hon. Members. I wonder what conversations the Leader of the House has had with either the Commission or the Petitions Committee and its Chairperson about the extent to which it is possible to get those up and running again in the short term, or to adapt them to cover a broader range of debates while we look at how we can bring Westminster Hall back in a virtual form.

Now that Westminster Hall debates and private Members' Bills are to cease for the next few weeks, it is true that the avenues by which Members of Parliament can scrutinise the Government will be reduced. It is therefore vital that the Government ensure that those means that are available are working as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Regarding the Chamber, I agree with those hon. Members who have said that the Backbench Business Committee should be allocated a generous amount of time on the Floor of the House to enable it to address the long-standing backlog, which clearly the closure of Westminster Hall does not help. That is one of the few remaining mechanisms by which Back-Bench MPs can get an issue debated in this House, so I ask the Leader of the House to consider allocating further time to the Committee on that basis.

Beyond events in the Chamber, there are questions that we table and letters that we write to Ministers, and there are still real delays in answering parliamentary questions, even when they are named day questions. When they are answered, too often the answers we currently get give insufficient detail or are out of date.

I have concerns about the responses to those letters, and I highlight the Treasury in particular as a Department from which we are still receiving stock replies. That is very frustrating for my constituents, who are often seeking a specific response to their query—that is why they have contacted my office in the first place—and I would be grateful if the Leader of the House could speak to the Chancellor about why that delay in particular is ongoing still within the Treasury, more than nine months on from the initial outbreak of coronavirus.

Finally, I pay tribute to the essential members of staff who are present in person on the parliamentary estate, and who are allowing proceedings to continue in their current form. I ask the Leader of the House to set out whether any decision has been made in relation to testing for those who are on the estate—an issue I have raised before—to ensure that any outbreak, when it does happen, is caught before it spreads further.

Mr Speaker: As I said, we have to bring the Leader of the House on at 7.50 pm, so please try to share out the time. There are five people to come.

7.41 pm

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con) [V]: I understand your strictures, Mr Speaker.

I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to speak this evening; it is thanks to the Leader of the House, who allowed remote participation in debates only a few days ago, that I can do so. It is the first time that I have spoken in a debate since 11 March, so it seems particularly ironic that I should be doing so on the subject of curtailing debate for the future.

I completely recognise the point made by the shadow Leader of the House that the health and safety of everyone who works in the House should be paramount during the pandemic. The impact of this dreadful disease on many people, who are not as obsessed with proceedings in the House, has obviously been shocking, and that comes first. Many people have lost lives and many people have lost their jobs and businesses.

I speak to oppose the motion relating to private Members' Bills. I was fortunate enough, almost a year ago, to be drawn seventh in the ballot for private Members' Bills, the first time since I was elected in 2005 that I have won the equivalent of the parliamentary lottery. My Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill, which was introduced on 5 February 2020 and was due to have its Second Reading

this Friday, was deferred for the fourth time until Friday 22 January; if this goes through, it will be deferred for the fifth time.

I have worked hard with many dedicated people who are utterly committed to improving the water quality of our rivers, through non-governmental organisations and individuals right across the country. We have had over 50,000 people sign a petition, and I have had support from hon. Members from all parties across the House: 106 MPs supported the Bill at the last count.

There is growing support out there for the measures contained in the Bill, from water companies and even from regulators and some Government officials. If this motion goes through, I will look for alternative means of bringing the Bill forward in other ways. I note that the Environment Bill has not completed its passage through this House and, of course, it has to proceed to the House of Lords thereafter.

I heard what the Leader of the House had to say about recommencing sitting Fridays as soon as the pandemic allows. While I welcome the motion particularly for Westminster Hall debates, for several of the private Members' Bills time will have run out, and any of them that have not yet had their Second Reading are most unlikely to get the time in a potential return after the half-term break to be able to conclude their proceedings. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) indicated, it may be possible for Bills that have concluded the Committee stage to proceed, if the Government allow, but that will not be the case for Bills such as mine. For that reason, although it may appear selfish, I will oppose this motion if it is put to a vote.

7.45 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: I will be brief. First, I wish to declare an interest: my private Member's Bill was due to be heard this Friday. I do not find it easy to see its postponement again, because it addresses one of the great issues at the moment: those NHS workers working on the frontline in our NHS and social care sectors who are here on visas and putting their lives on the line. Like many others, I believe they deserve the right to indefinite leave to remain in this country.

I fully accept and welcome the fact that we should not put the staff in this place at risk of any additional contact with Members, members of the public or each other, or put them in any danger or at any risk. However, during this pandemic we have seen businesses up and down this country use their ingenuity to find ways of working within the restrictions and adapting to cope, and we should do the same to protect our democracy.

At the moment, we do not have equality of democracy. I am in Edinburgh and I would have to travel to a hotspot, perhaps putting my family and constituents at risk from covid-19. I am not in London and cannot easily travel to Westminster, so I believe we need to find a way of allowing each part of our democracy—our democratic process—to operate and allowing each Member equal access to that process through a virtual Parliament, to protect not just ourselves, but our staff and constituents in the future.

I ask the Government to consider that, and to consider taking on some of those private Members' Bills that would have been taken this Friday. I make no bones

about the fact that I would like the Government to recognise the contribution made by the NHS workers—the foreign nationals—who have done so much for this country in this crisis.

7.47 pm

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): I will try to be even more succinct than I have to be. I have only three points to make. First, we should regard what we do here as critically important. Too often this House lacks self-confidence, and we undervalue what we do and the importance of our role in holding Governments to account.

The second point I wish to make is about staff. I think that all Members of this House value enormously the excellent staff and support that we have here. We want them, and Members participating here, to be as safe as it is possible to be, but it is also important to say that in my 23 years here I have always found that the staff of this House take as much pride in our democratic functions and the duty we have here, on behalf of the public, as Members do. So it is important that we recognise that. We are all part of the same critically important enterprise.

My final point is to thank you, Mr Speaker, for the assurances you have given and the Leader of the House for those that he has given. I reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), in expressing the hope that when the Leader of the House stands up shortly to respond he will make it absolutely clear that there is a guarantee that we will see those days restored somehow for private Members' Bills and that we will see Westminster Hall returning, wherever it may be and in whatever form.

7.49 pm

Mr Rees-Mogg: It might be helpful if I try to respond to the point just made by my hon. Friends the Members for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) and for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). I am afraid that, in the course of this pandemic, giving guarantees has been an unwise thing to do, so I cannot go as far as giving a guarantee. However, I can reiterate my promise that we will bring back PMBs and Westminster Hall as soon as is possible and practical in view of the circumstances. I think it important that we do that, and I think there is a clear demand across the House that we should do that.

I do not want to give any promises about the next Session and what will happen, but I think it is reasonable to have discussions. I do not want to go further than that, because I think I would be going beyond what anyone has agreed at this stage, but I think for discussions to take place as to what will happen is perfectly reasonable, without giving any guarantees.

While I am on this point, I want to apologise to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne). I am well aware that he has done an enormous amount of work on his Bill. He has gained widespread support for it—it has been a model of how to gain support for a private Member's Bill—and we have now pulled the rug on him for a fifth time. That is not what I wish to be doing. All I can plead is that the pandemic has led to a considerable degree of uncertainty, and that it has

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

always been the aim of the Government, and one that I very much hold dear, to get back to normal as soon as possible.

Even in today's debate, we see that when people appear remotely there is no possibility of an intervention. We see the Chamber still at a fraction of its fullness. We see in all the debates taking place in these circumstances the imperfection of the constraints under which we are operating, so it has always been my hope to get back to normal at as early a stage as possible, and therefore to recognise that we do things when we have to, not because we actually want to do them.

We have used technology innovatively—a point made by a number of speakers—to make the best of a bad job, in reality to try to ensure that as much scrutiny as possible takes place. I agree with all those hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), who said that we are here to represent our constituents and to ensure that their concerns are brought forward.

May I thank the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for her support and the support of her party in this, and for the seriousness with which she has approached the issue? She made a moving speech in support of the motion. I am also grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) for her support and the questions she raises about Bill Committee evidence being given virtually and whether Bill Committees can sit virtually. Bill Committees have a manageable number, so I think it is reasonable for them to continue as they are, but she makes a very good and fair point.

My right hon. Friend also raised the question of the petitions debates and the Backbench Business Committee, as did the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). I can say that we will try to make time available in the Chamber for Petitions Committee debates, as we did earlier on in the summer. Actually, from the Petitions Committee's point of view, if the debates are in the Chamber rather than in Westminster Hall, the Committee will benefit from those arrangements because everything, ultimately, is about this Chamber, which is the beating heart of Parliament.

It has always been the aim of the Government to ensure that the Chamber continues to operate, because it is the votes here that change the law. It is here that the most important statements are made. Within the limited resources that we have, be they financial or be they the number of people in the broadcasting team, we must always ensure that the Chamber itself comes first.

Mr Speaker, I am very grateful for your reminding everybody that financial decisions are not made by me. Much though I am a hawkish protector of taxpayers' money, decisions on whether to spend £100,000 on a remote Westminster Hall are made by the House services. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) made some measured points about whether we were going far enough or not. I think we have the balance right. I think that our covid-secure workplace—Mr Speaker, you and your team and the Clerks have worked very hard to ensure that that is the case—ensures that we can get on with our job.

I enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch because he normally has a sort of Herod-like approach to private Members' Bills—the more innocent they are, the more likely they are to be massacred—so to see him as a champion of the 151 is perhaps, to a degree, ironic. None the less, I so agree with them that one of the fundamental rights we have as Members is to introduce a Bill and to try to get time for that Bill to be debated. I was actually on the Procedure Committee when there was a suggestion that the number of Bills a Member could introduce should be limited; I always thought that that would have been a monstrous constraint, so I absolutely understand and sympathise with the points he is making. I think it is actually perfectly consistent to support the right to introduce a Bill, but then to oppose individual Bills.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) ended splendidly by quoting what was said by the Member for Oxford University in 1945. I do not know whether he is listening via the Parliament channel, but I am afraid to say I have seen him do it before, and it loses its impact on second playing. It is a bit like the BBC: his speeches are now full of repeats. However, he made a point that I must disagree with. He said that without Standing Orders there would be complete control by the Government. That is not actually the way it works. Standing Order No. 14 is the Standing Order that gives control to the Government, so the Standing Orders are in the Government's interests, and it is a commitment of the Government to ensure that Standing Orders are followed.

7.55 pm

One hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Business of the House (Today) motion, the Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Order, this day).

Mr Speaker: I call Sir Christopher Chope to move his amendment (a) to motion 4.

Sir Christopher Chope: In the light of this debate, I am going to put my trust in the Leader of the House; if that trust is not well founded, I will behave like the late Sir Alan Herbert. Having said that, I will not move my amendment.

Mr Speaker: I think we will leave it that the amendment will not be moved.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) and the order of this House on 23 September 2020, there shall be no sittings in Westminster Hall with effect from Thursday 14 January until the House otherwise orders.

Mr Speaker: We now come to motion 5. Sir Christopher, I take it that you will not move your amendment (a), so I will put the Question, with your agreement.

Sir Christopher Chope *indicated assent.*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS) (NO. 9)

Ordered,

That the Order of the House of 16 January 2020 (Business of the House (Private Members' Bills)), as amended by the Orders of the House of 25 March, 22 April, 12 May, 10 June, 1 July, 3 November and 30 December 2020, is further amended as follows:

leave out "15 January 2021, 22 January 2021, 29 January 2021, 5 February 2021, 26 February 2021, 5 March 2021, 12 March 2021 and 26 March 2021".—(*Mr Rees-Mogg.*)

Mr Speaker: Can I just say to everyone that the Commission of this House takes seriously its role as an employer and its duty of care to all who work here? At its most recent meeting, as has been the case many times before, we have been guided by Public Health England's advice. We want to do everything in our power to make our workplace as safe as possible for Members and staff alike, even if at times that means we have to put some limits on our activities, which goes against all our instincts as parliamentarians.

I am thinking of the tragic loss of one of those people who serve this House, so at this time my thoughts are with their family and their colleagues. All I can say is that it is not a great time for this country—it is a sad time—and as soon as we can, I want this House back to normal. That is an assurance from myself, as well as from the Leader of the House.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CIVIL AVIATION)

That the draft Airports Slot Allocation (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 1 December, be approved.—(*Eddie Hughes.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Mr Speaker: I call Sarah Owen, who is participating virtually—[*Interruption.*] I do apologise. Sarah, welcome. I am glad you can do it in person, which is a lot easier—tonight.

Safety of pregnant women during the coronavirus outbreak

7.58 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I am presenting this petition, which is in memory of Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong. Mary's husband, Ernest Boateng, started this petition after his wife tragically died, at the age of 28, while pregnant and working as a nurse in Luton last year. The petition, which has been signed by over 100,000 people, calls on the Government to protect pregnant women by ensuring that they either can work from home or must be suspended from work on full pay during this pandemic.

The announcement of a vaccine, which is to be rolled out imminently, is good news for many people who are vulnerable, but pregnant women will not be given the vaccine. That means they will not be protected when other vulnerable people will be. The Government must consider the specific needs of pregnant women to ensure that they are safe throughout this crisis. The guidance for pregnant women has been confusing throughout this pandemic. As the petition notes, the current guidance

"continues to list pregnant women as vulnerable and says that if they cannot work from home then they should adhere to strict social distancing",

but we know that is not happening. The petition states that

"research by Pregnant Then Screwed in October found that 57% of pregnant women who are working outside of the home do not feel safe, and only half of pregnant women...have had a risk assessment from their employer".

It notes that

"the groups at increased risk of severe COVID-19 were recognised including the increased risk for mothers from Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage".

Black pregnant women were eight times more likely to be hospitalised than white pregnant women, according to research by Oxford University. We also know that maternal covid-19 is associated with an approximately three times greater risk of pre-term birth. We ask that no other family has to experience what Ernest has. We demand that all pregnant women are protected by the Government's ensuring they can either work from home or be suspended from work on full pay during this crisis.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of Ernest Boateng,

Declares that the wife of Ernest Boateng, Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong, a 28 year-old pregnant nurse, tragically died in April 2020, after becoming infected with COVID-19; notes that a corresponding petition online has been signed by over 100,000 people; further declares that, since Mary's death, very little has been done to protect pregnant women from this life-threatening virus, despite studies showing that for those in the later stages of pregnancy, they are more likely to become severely unwell; further that the announcement of a vaccine which is to be rolled out imminently is good news for many people who are vulnerable, but pregnant women will not be given the vaccine; notes that the current guidance continues to list pregnant women as vulnerable and says that if they cannot work from home then they should adhere to strict social distancing; further notes that research by Pregnant Then Screwed in October found that 57% of pregnant women who are working outside of the home do not feel safe, and only half of pregnant women (53%) have had a risk assessment from their employer; further declares that, even then, many employers are ignoring their own risk assessment; further notes that only 1% of pregnant women who cannot work from home have been suspended from work on safety grounds; further that the groups at increased risk of severe COVID-19 were recognised including the increased risk for mothers from Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage; and further declares that Mary should not have been working based on the facts and findings above as she was 35 weeks pregnant when she tested positive for COVID-19.

[Sarah Owen]

The petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons urges the Government to protect pregnant women during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring they can either work from home or that they have the right to full paid leave.

And the petitioner remains, etc.]

[P002643]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you for presenting your petition, Sarah. While you were doing that, the Dispatch Box was sanitised, so we can now move to the next item.

Small Business Support: Covid-19

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Eddie Hughes.)

8.1 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: It is unfortunate that I have to raise, and not for the first time with this Government, an issue that faces so many of our businesses, particularly small enterprises. There can surely be nobody in the House—or, indeed, the country—who is unaware of the impact of the pandemic on them, on their businesses, their employees and their families. Every business in every sector in this country is actually a group of people or often only an individual. My concern for their future is matched only by my admiration for how so many of them, working and using their ingenuity to stay within the rules and restrictions on covid-19, are staying afloat, too often without any support at all.

As with practically everything else in the past year, circumstances have dictated a different approach for us all, from how we go about our daily lives to how we shop to how we do business. We have watched as companies have skilfully adapted to ever-changing circumstances, but we have also seen the cost to our arts and entertainment sector, our hospitality sector and quite starkly to our retail sector, where even big names have been vulnerable. To be fair, the Arcadia Group was perhaps already vulnerable before covid-19, and likewise Debenhams, but that is no consolation to the thousands of people who spend their time worrying about whether their jobs can be saved from the rubble of what were once some of the proudest names on our high streets, or whether they might be next.

In the run-up to Christmas, small businesses had to face the reality that the usual festive volume of trade, which they need to enjoy a profitable or often even a survivable year, was gone. The two most recent former Conservative Prime Ministers made no secret of the fact that they believed that small business was the backbone of the British economy. Promises were made. I ask this Government to consider whether they have been fulfilled or whether, as I believe, more needs to be done. Yes, there are packages of support, loans and furlough, but they are all short term. They are patches—knee-jerk, bit-by-bit responses to a long-term problem with unprecedented implications. Surely it is long past time to bring those patches together and create a long-term strategy to support that backbone of the economy.

As a politician, one of the things I believe we should try to do is to get to the heart of what people actually need and find practical, workable solutions that can make a difference to people's lives. In the past year, that has been a challenge. For example, the most recent forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility suggests that the economy will have shrunk by a frightening 11.3%. At the end of September, GDP was already down 9.7%. We should remember exactly what it is we are talking about. Behind all the numbers and equations are people who feel the ramifications of the sums that we do.

Before Christmas, I wrote to the Chancellor urging him to support an idea that I believe would still have value in supporting small businesses, particularly those in retail: covering their postage fees, to help level the

playing field with online giants. Freeing small shops of delivery costs for online purchases would go some way to help combat the decreased footfall over months of lockdown. As restrictions are tightened and our worlds become even smaller, the impact of such a move cannot be underestimated. Together with the suspension of business rates, it could support small businesses in much the same way as the eat out to help out scheme rightly pumped £800 million of Exchequer cash into hospitality. It would also give them something with which to fight back against the online giants, who have soaked up so much custom as we all seek ways of shopping during enforced home time. The Federation of Small Businesses welcomed the idea as providing its members with the boost they need to help level the playing field.

Too many people have been completely left out of support. We need to innovate our way out of this crisis, so where is the help for the self-employed and the entrepreneurs whose ingenuity and inventiveness we will rely on as we look for growth? We need them to survive along with those small businesses, until they are all able to thrive once again. In arts and entertainment, an industry in which there are so many small companies and self-employed people, there is a huge hole that we need to fill—a gap in the safety net that this Government promised when they said they would do whatever it took to get us through this.

I am a great believer in putting oneself in someone else's shoes to look at an issue—the constituent with a problem, the business facing bankruptcy because it is following rules or the make-up artist, musician or freelance journalist who cannot work and whose pleas for support have fallen on deaf ears for 10 months. Perhaps it is easier for me to appreciate that last category. In a previous career, I was a freelance broadcaster for some years. I can see only too clearly what my life might have been in this time. I see it reflected in their campaign and in their hardship. I saw it every day in my constituency when I was still able to shop, socially distanced and wearing a face mask, in the many and varied independent outlets that are the lifeblood of my community.

A high street is not just a thoroughfare. It is where people come together and support their communities, whether or not they are making a conscious decision to do so. We might not have thought about it before as we nipped between the newsagent and the baker. We would notice it now, however, if they were no longer there to nip to. We often speak about businesses as if they were just there to fill the coffers and there were no humans behind them at all. Behind every idea and every counter is someone with a family and a mortgage who has been brave enough to try. They need us to take on covid for them, because that is what they deserve. Just as they have adapted to serve our needs and bring us hope and joy, we have to adapt. We have to extend furlough, suspend business rates and admit that schemes in place for last summer will no longer be enough come the spring.

We need communication across all four nations, and we need every Government in this United Kingdom to put politics aside and do what is best and what is right for those who need it most. To that end, I ask the Government to put pressure on the Scottish National party at Holyrood to expedite the many applications from people who are still waiting for support, even

though the money is there. Tonight I spoke to a constituent in precisely that position. As an MP, the health of my communities is always at the forefront of my mind, even in good times. I hope and ask that our small businesses are at the forefront of the Government's.

8.8 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Kemi Badenoch): I will just take my mask off—I am afraid that I am still not used to the mask compliance in the House.

I want to start by congratulating the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing a debate on this important subject. Coronavirus has deeply affected the lives of millions of people throughout the country, including those whose livelihoods depend on the small and medium-sized businesses that are the backbone of our economy. I would like to assure the hon. Lady, who spoke passionately about what has been happening in our country, that this Government care deeply about the SME sector, and I know that this strength of feeling is shared by Members across the House.

The hon. Lady mentioned her “pay the postage” campaign, and I listened with interest. The Treasury is always very keen on new ideas on how to support businesses as we want to see them grow, thrive and compete. I understand that she has already been in conversation with the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), on this issue, and I will leave it to BEIS to respond to her proposals in detail. More broadly, the Government have put in place a broad package of support to help as many small and medium-sized enterprises as possible.

I will now turn to some of the main elements of that support, which, at every stage of this crisis, we have really pushed to every part of the economy, targeting a significant proportion of our £280 billion economic support package. Almost 10 million jobs have been furloughed under the coronavirus job retention scheme. This has given business owners the certainty that they can pay their workers' wages. The self-employment income support scheme has so far provided grants to almost 3 million people, including small business owners, while more than 1.4 million small and medium-sized businesses have received over £68 billion of loans. In addition, we have provided tens of millions of pounds of cash grants to businesses as well as tax cuts and deferrals.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for giving way and the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) for her contribution. I think that this is the first full virtual Adjournment debate that I can recall being a participant in.

I spoke to the Minister beforehand on this matter, but first I would like to put on record my thanks to her and to the Government for all that they have done—we could not have survived this without all their help. May I just make a small plea for egg producers? They continue to sell, but have lost their market in hospitality, and need support. Others such as artisan food producers, whose product is of such a high standard, no longer have footfall and their small business is on the brink of collapse without substantial help to pay off their equipment that cannot be used. What help can we give those people?

Kemi Badenoch: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He asks a really good question. The Government recognise that businesses within the hospitality supply chain have been disrupted by the recent necessary restrictions to hospitality businesses since the start of the pandemic. The Government have acted to deliver support to those businesses and ease cash flow problems for them through business support schemes, but businesses that have not been eligible for grants may be able to benefit from the additional restrictions grants. We recently increased the funding available under that scheme to £1.6 billion across England, and I know that similar schemes will be happening across the various devolved Administrations. It is up to each local authority to determine eligibility for the scheme, based on its assessment of local economic need. However, we encourage local authorities to support businesses that have been impacted by covid-19 restrictions, but which are ineligible for those other grant schemes. So there will be support—that is the point that I want to make to the hon. Gentleman.

On the support that we have provided to small business owners, I believe that I said that we had provided 1.4 million SMEs with more than £68 billion of loans. We have also included a temporary reduction in the VAT rate and the business rates holiday, both of which will run until 31 March. Financially distressed businesses and individuals have also been able to benefit from more flexible deadlines through the time to pay scheme. Furthermore, we are providing extra help through our welfare system for those who need it most, as well as other support such as payments for those asked to self-isolate. Quite simply, this is a support package that is unprecedented in its scale, and we know that it is working. In fact, the International Monetary Fund describes our economic plan as

“one of the best examples of co-ordinated action globally”

and successful in holding down unemployment and business failures.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh West made a very good point about how private sector businesses have been able to adapt and we should be able to follow suit, and we are doing that. We have not stopped there with the things that we have done. We have faced the evolving nature of the crisis. We have redoubled our efforts to protect businesses, jobs and incomes in response to the

huge challenge presented by the virus. As the situation changes, we assess and we adapt. As a result, we have extended the CJRS until April. We are supporting self-employed people with a fourth income grant, which, combined with up to £14,070 of individual support from the first and second grants, places our scheme among the most generous for self-employed workers in the world.

Furthermore, last week we issued £4.6 billion of additional support that will protect jobs and benefit 600,000 businesses around the UK. Following this change, business premises in England that are required to close, including those in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, can now claim a one-off grant of up to £9,000, and that is on top of existing support of up to £3,000 a month. We have also made available £500 million in discretionary funding for local authorities in England to support local businesses in their areas—money that is in addition to the £1.1 billion we had earlier provided on this front.

As I said to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), this extraordinary package of economic help extends to every region and nation of the United Kingdom. As hon. Members will recall, in December we further increased our up-front guarantee of funding for the devolved Administrations this year from £14 billion to over £16 billion. At every stage of this crisis, we have striven to help as many people and businesses as we can, and as rapidly as possible.

We acknowledge that we have not been able to support everyone in the way that they would want. However, individuals who find that they are ineligible for one support scheme may still be able to claim from one of the many other sources I mentioned earlier.

The Government are immensely grateful for the contribution of small business owners and their workers in every part of the UK throughout the crisis. As I hope I have illustrated, the Government have sought to protect and support this vital sector at every turn, and we will continue that approach until the battle against coronavirus is won.

Question put and agreed to.

8.15 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	Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Chris Loder	Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spennings) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
		Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Mark Tami
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Ben Everitt
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP)	Ian Paisley
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Mark Tami
David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Patrick Grady
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Tami (Ogmore) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Sarah Olney
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	Patrick Grady

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Jonathan Edwards
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gill Furniss (Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Mark Tami
James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Mark Tami	John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Ben Lake	Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Heappey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami	Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anthony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
		Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady	Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Sarah Olney	Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Mark Tami	John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Chris Loder	Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami	Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Sarah Olney
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Rachel Hopkins
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 13 January 2021

[DAME ANGELA EAGLE *in the Chair*]

School Closures: Support for Pupils

9.30 am

Dame Angela Eagle (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 is respected. Members must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall. Members are expected to remain for the winding-up speeches, provided that there is space in the room, which it looks like there is today. Members are 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. That rule has been more honoured in the breach than in the observance, and I intend to see it observed, if possible, in the current circumstances. Members in the later stages of the call list should use the seats in the Public Gallery and move into the horseshoe when seats there become available. Members can speak only from the horseshoe. I remind Members that they are strongly encouraged to wear a face covering when they are not speaking.

9.31 am

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered support for pupils' education during school closures.

May I congratulate you, Dame Angela, on your new status, which is well deserved? Thank you for chairing the debate this morning. Yesterday, it looked as though it might not proceed because of the uncertainty over Westminster Hall debates, so I thank the House authorities and all the staff for being present here today to enable this sitting to happen. I hope that good sense will prevail later today over future arrangements.

I start by paying tribute to the extraordinary professionalism and commitment of the teaching staff and senior leadership teams in all our local schools and colleges. Like our health professionals, they are very much frontline workers and have worked relentlessly during the past 10 months. In today's debate, it is essential that we recognise the importance of schools in addressing the inequality gap.

It is estimated that in the first lockdown some 575 million learning days were lost; the average loss was 65 days per pupil. All of us, having been through the education system, can think back to those days and recall a particular piece of information being imparted by a teacher and how that registered with us. We can also think of the days that we missed when others attended school and what we subsequently learned from them. We felt a sense of loss that we were not there to participate, so the fact that children and young people could have lost 65 days is of course quite significant for their future development.

The Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, concluded in her report in December that just five days had been lost on average across schools in the autumn term, but in some places it may have been up to 10 days. Certainly in Warwickshire, primary schools on average saw 92% attendance, state secondary schools averaged 82% and special schools averaged 80%. But just looking at the autumn term, we see indications quite early on that the trends were concerning. By the week ending 16 October, some 400,000 children were off school, with 50,000 estimated to have covid and the remainder self-isolating, and by the last week of November, 1 million children were out of school. At one secondary school in my constituency, just 63% were physically present.

Of course that has a disproportionate impact, as the Children's Commissioner said. It has considerable consequences for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and that is particularly concerning when the UK has one of the worst levels of inequality in the developed world, as highlighted by the United Nations interlocutor in his report back in 2019. We have 4.2 million children living in poverty, 600,000 more than in 2010, according to the Child Poverty Action Group, so even before the pandemic, UK schools faced considerable challenges.

With the introduction of the third lockdown, we are seeing more children being sent to school than attended during the first lockdown. The figures that we have show attendance of between a quarter and a third of pupils in school; that compares with 10% to 15% in the first lockdown. A main driver has been the change to the definition of what constitutes a critical worker, or what is necessary attendance, putting schools in the difficult position of having to assess this on a case-by-case basis. Parents are also having to make decisions based on financial demands rather than the guidance. A headteacher in my constituency believes it is an absolute scandal. They quoted the Department for Education, which states that

"we are reducing overall social contact across...the country rather than individually by each institution",

which is leading to the overloading of our schools and their acting almost as care workers for younger people to support that.

The much higher attendance rates have resulted in staff being in school when they should be teaching from home. If teachers are delivering face-to-face learning to a blended age group of pupils and are expected to provide digital content, they are effectively doubling their workload. In turn, schools are having staffing issues due to illness and the need to self-isolate, and often the staff themselves face childcare issues. The other principal driver of the increased numbers in school is that those without laptops or space to study are now eligible to attend school. That has led to unions such as the National Association of Head Teachers highlighting how the high numbers will simply undermine the purpose and effectiveness of the shutdown itself. That is why online learning and the tools to enable it are so crucial.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I also add my congratulations to you, Dame Angela, on becoming a dame? I did not know until just now. I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me a chance to intervene. Does he not agree that in rural constituencies such as mine in Strangford, where broadband connection is a

[*Jim Shannon*]

massive issue, steps need to be taken to ensure that every child has access to stable connections to be able to learn remotely, and, if not, there must be a place for them in schools with functioning broadband? If we have to have an alternative, we need a system in place that enables that to happen.

Matt Western: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who always makes such valid points. I will cover that issue in a moment, but he is absolutely right. Access to broadband internet is an essential provision and should be a part of our critical infrastructure so that every household has it. Whether someone is working or studying from home, it is as important as getting gas, electricity or water to the household.

It has been clear from the outset that with the majority of children removed from school and college settings, there is a huge challenge in delivering educational learning in terms of both channel and approach, both from the delivery and the receiving end. According to Ofcom, up to 1.78 million children in the UK—about 9%—do not have access to a laptop, desktop or tablet at home. Almost 900,000 of those live in a household with just a mobile internet connection.

According to the education charity Teach First, four in five schools with the poorest pupils are hit the hardest and do not have enough devices and internet access to ensure that those self-isolating can continue to learn. However, recent Government announcements have been more positive, including that on 560,000 laptops and tablets, and a further 300,000 were announced yesterday. That is welcome. Perhaps the Minister will confirm the Department's total cumulative number since March and April against the objective of 1.78 million.

The move by Three UK, followed by British Telecom, Vodafone and many others, to provide free data and unlimited broadband in support of the hardware is also very welcome and should be applauded. But why did it take the Government so long? Why did they dither and delay when the need was there from March last year? The initial announcement in April, when the Government stated that they would seek to ensure that disadvantaged pupils would benefit from free laptops or tablets, was immediately challenged by the Good Law Project, a legal campaign group, which said that the numbers announced were a “drop in the ocean”. The group went on to say that it found the lack of details about the scheme troubling as only a small subset of pupils would benefit.

Back in June I raised the issue with the Minister's Department in a written question and I followed it up in the Chamber. In reply to my written question I was told that 200,000 laptops and tablets had been ordered on 19 April. However, a Government document entitled “Devices and 4G wireless routers data: Ad-hoc Notice: Laptops, tablets and 4G wireless routers for disadvantaged and vulnerable children: progress data”—Members may not have seen that report—stated:

“The first devices were ordered on 15th May, and the first devices were dispatched on 18th May.”

It is still not clear to me what happened, and which was true. Was it 19 April or 15 May? It certainly seems that the Government were slow to react to the challenge and to recognise the ongoing need.

At the same time, in Warwickshire, I was told that 1,463 laptops had been requested, but that by early July only 45 had been received. By 1 June the Government had certainly missed their target of delivering 230,000 laptops and tablets. On 21 October the Secretary of State said that he would deliver 500,000 laptops, noting that 200,000 had already been delivered, but by early November the Government had announced that they had slashed the allocation of Government-promised laptops for the poorest and most vulnerable children across the country by a staggering 80%. My question to the Minister is why the number was reduced. Why was that announcement made?

As I say, more recent announcements have been more positive, but for schools in my constituency there is clearly a long way to go. In Warwick and Leamington, on average, 17% of pupils do not have access to digital equipment or broadband for home working. In the absence of Government support, 83% of schools, according to my own survey, have provided laptops out of their own funds. Those are hard-pressed funds in schools. One primary school that will remain nameless confided that it has almost 50 children without devices, and has received just four in total.

Of course it is all too easy to think of the issue as about purely the supply of laptops, but even when a household has a device and internet access that does not mean that the pupil can make use of them, because of such factors as low parental computer literacy, parents who work from home needing to use the device, school-age siblings also needing to use it, or simply access to broadband capacity. Perhaps there may also be a lack of access to printers or other hardware in the household. That is all understandable. For many there is simply the problem of broadband or mobile internet access, as the hon. Member for Strangford (*Jim Shannon*) said. In particular, there are certain buildings in remote rural areas where mobile signals are limited.

Finally there is the question of content support. It is worth highlighting this week's positive move by the BBC to deliver an education offer to children, teachers and parents through CBBC and “BBC Bitesize Daily”, while BBC2 will provide programming aimed at supporting the GCSE curriculum. That is all immensely welcome and will complement greatly the online teaching that is being facilitated through Oak National Academy and other providers such as the website Hungry Little Minds. Naturally, there is also a need to deliver online teaching, which in turn leads to demand in relation to training needs for the delivery of the new channel for learning.

Many schools are also reporting significant financial pressures. In the survey that I conducted across Warwick and Leamington during the autumn term it was apparent that there were immediate and significant costs—operational costs, but also a need for capital support. As for operating costs, a couple of primary schools faced additional costs of £20,000, but the average figure across the board was something like £13,000, or £1,400 per month—the additional cost of sanitising, cleaning, and ensuring that the physical environment is safe and usable for pupils and teaching staff alike. However, all schools reported a significant unmet staffing need because of budget limitations, and 83% stated that they had faced staffing shortages.

Schools also said that there was a greater need for them with respect to their responsibility for protecting children and ensuring their general wellbeing, and while

mental health is of course a particular and obvious concern, there is also the issue of the increased risk of harm to children. According to a report for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, in the first lockdowns there was a 22% increase in the number of counselling sessions relating to physical abuse, and a threefold increase in the number of Childline counselling sessions per week about child sexual abuse within the family. Those are all areas where we need to provide greater support for pupils, young people and teaching staff.

There have been pressures on school leadership teams, who faced the responsibility of undertaking flow testing of pupils and additional tasks alongside the ongoing pressures they already have. I highlight the need for more support for special schools, which face huge pressures having to teach face-to-face in intense environments, and where there is a real need for more financial support, for additional staffing and, I would advocate, for the vaccination of teaching staff and pupils.

On the point about nurseries, the transmission data, from October 2020, is outdated. According to the Office for National Statistics, transmission among zero to five-year-olds is now the same as among five to nine-year-olds. Funding is needed to support our nurseries.

I will move on to the situation with free school meal vouchers. One of the implications of pupils not being in school is for their health and welfare while they are at home, possibly alone, where many will go without a decent hot meal that would have ordinarily been provided by the school. That is why the provision of free school meals has been so important, in particular via the vouchers during the first wave. It is surprising that the Government and, dare I say, their Back Benchers voted not to continue with that provision in subsequent holidays and into the future, until there was the Marcus Rashford-inspired U-turn.

With so many pupils out of school again, the need to provide the equivalent of free school meals is significant and many schools are urging that cash payments be made. The Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East echo that call for cash payments as a replacement for free school meals, as they know what children need and that allows choice, accessibility, discretion and safety, all of which are valued by families.

Jim Shannon: The news stories this morning were full of the value of the voucher scheme and of the food that has been delivered to children, saying that it does not have the necessary vitamins and nutrients. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that that should be looked at to ensure that the vouchers and the food stuffs that are going out satisfy the child and give them the nourishment that they need?

Matt Western: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I am about to come on to that point. The figures quoted in the media in the last 24 hours, about the profiteering that is taking place by some of the companies that have moved into the sector, are obscene. The claim is that the food has a value of £30, when in fact people could pick it up for £5 to £10.

The Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East echoed the call for cash payments. In research conducted by the charities, 81% said that direct payments worked better than grab bags or vouchers. When it comes

to grab bags, or “hampers”, as they are now euphemistically known, there has been yet another shocking revelation about the company Chartwells, which has been providing food bags for £30, when the content would barely register a fiver or a tenner at the till, and the association of some people with that business and BlackRock.

Speaking to local schools, families are desperate and the schools are angry that the Government have not acted faster. As one headteacher put it to me:

“The Government communications have been poor. They knew schools were shutting, so why have plans not been made for free school meals?”

He was on a call with 20 other headteachers across the region and they were all of the same view. Certainly, some believe that the Edenred scheme worked fairly satisfactorily by comparison.

I would love to spend more time on the exam situation, but the position in which colleges and schools found themselves at the beginning of this term, particularly in regard to vocational subjects and BTEC exams, challenged them. They felt let down by the Department for Education. There are real concerns among students, as well as schools and teaching staff across the board, about the plans for the summer exams and how they will be measured against their learning performance.

Finally, I want to look at protection for teaching staff. We talk about support for pupils, but we need support and protection for teaching staff. There is a need for vaccination and all staff in schools, including support staff, must be a much higher priority. I raised that on 3 December, and again on 30 December, with the Secretary of State.

In September, a GMB union internal survey of over 600 teaching assistants showed that 55% of them said they did not feel safe at work. Elsewhere, Unison has highlighted that the hardest hit are likely to be school support staff, as they are often agency workers, older, disproportionately black, Asian or of mixed ethnicity and come from more disadvantaged backgrounds. If there is the political will for schools to remain open—of course, we all want them to reopen as early as possible—school staff must be placed at a higher priority than they are presently.

The past year has been far from academic, Dame Angela. The support needed for pupils’ education is considerable and complex, but it is not mission impossible. I am afraid that the Government’s work through the course of the pandemic has, on occasion, been of little merit. Perhaps it could be described, in its own right, like coursework: late submission, no shows, confusion and, in the eyes of school staff and governors, a tragic failure of leadership from the Secretary of State. This generation of children must not lose out any longer. These are some of the most important days of their lives, which are precious to their development and the realisation of their potential. The Government must dig deep, and not short-change their long-term future.

9.51 am

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): I, too, congratulate you, Dame Angela, on becoming a dame. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) on securing this important debate.

If 1870 is remembered as the start of universal elementary education and 1944 for secondary education for all, then 2021 must be remembered as the year that online

[*Esther McVey*]

standards for education were set. If schools are to be closed and pupils are to be at home, they need devices, reliable network coverage and a secure platform for schooling to be delivered. We need a set curriculum, oversight and support for pupils, and a structured feedback loop from pupils to teachers. If standards are not set, this generation of political leaders and educationalists will be failing to live up to not only the laws of the land, but the educational path that this country has set for its children for over 150 years. There cannot be lockdowns and school closures with no full-time alternatives at the ready.

The Government have taken steps. Laptops are going to pupils, guidance is in place and there are independent educational providers coming forward—Oak National Academy, BrainPOP, Creativebug and the BBC—but there is not a comprehensive system in place.

A survey conducted in the last week by the Sutton Trust has reported today that only one in 10 teachers feels that their pupils have adequate access to laptops. A similar percentage feel that their pupils have adequate access to the internet. We have falling standards and a division in provision. The National Foundation for Educational Research found the average learning lost for all pupils was three months, but that more than 50% of pupils in the most deprived areas had lost four months or more. They also said that while 1% of pupils in the wealthiest areas had lost an estimated six months in effective learning due to the lockdown, in the poorest areas more than 10 times as many were affected as badly.

If we believe in social mobility—and I certainly do—then this is not good enough. We need to act to support our pupils, and at pace. Education is the great equaliser. We have to adapt and adapt quickly. I say that because I look at how businesses have adapted to cater for their customers and upgrade their capability. Online demand has increased by over 100% in retail and for online video subscriptions. Microsoft Teams has grown from 20 million users in November 2019 to 115 million daily active users in October 2020.

If businesses can develop, adapt and meet the need, then schools must do exactly the same thing: they must react with speed to give pupils the education that they need. Like it or not, online education is here to stay, and once developed it could become an exceptional resource with wider uses, such as allowing children to catch up at home if they have been ill or helping to cater to the 60,000 pupils who are taught at home—that number leapt up by 13% in 2018-19. It could even support pupils who have an exceptional capability in a subject to surge ahead.

Where do we begin? We have to get teachers, unions, Ofsted and the Government to come together to set out that standard, because if unions, teachers and local councils are arguing for pupils not to return to school, and with the Government's announcement of a third national lockdown, they must come together to provide for a full, accessible online curriculum. There is joint responsibility; therefore, joint action is needed. The Government need to reinstate their manifesto pledge of 1 gigabit capability for everyone by 2025, so that pupils, irrespective of where they live, can get a proper online connection.

In 1969, the Open University was created to give open access to higher education, increase social mobility and support the economy. We need a similar game-changing moment now in online education, where we could become a global leader. The Open University now qualifies as one of the world's largest universities and has a £3 billion benefit to the UK economy. It is time we took a leap forward in online education, and 2021 needs to be the year that happens. Will the Minister meet me and my Blue Collar Conservatism colleagues to set out the new online curriculum that needs to happen, and the online connection and devices that need to be given, to ensure that social mobility happens and that we have an education fit for all?

9.57 am

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dame Angela. I, too, congratulate you on becoming a dame in the new year's honours, which was very well deserved. I thank and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) on securing the debate and on his opening remarks, which covered all the issues that I believe need to be addressed. I also thank and congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on their work on this issue.

This is an urgent issue, and one that many colleagues have been talking about since the start of lockdown. Just yesterday I heard from one of my headteachers, who said that she was still waiting for the 114 laptops that the school had ordered and that were due to arrive last Wednesday. That is despite assurances given to Members of Parliament that laptops should arrive within 48 hours of being ordered. It is clear that the Government have inexplicably failed to plan ahead, once again putting kids last, not first, in this pandemic.

I am also disappointed that the Government seemingly took their foot off the accelerator in supporting kids to learn at home, following the easing of lockdown. They had a woefully slow start in March, which is on public record, with only 51,000 of the 200,000 laptops promised in March delivered by the end of May. I had to put in a freedom of information request to find that out. That was compounded by chaos in the supply of free school meals during lockdown, and a lack of guidance for teachers and support for parents.

Roll the clock forward nine months and it appears, on one level, that not much has changed. Incremental progress has been made, but it is utterly piecemeal and still far too confused. That has continued to be a hallmark of this Government. While the Department for Education should be making administrative decisions with clarity and forward planning, it instead lurches from crisis to crisis. It is not an excuse to say that the new variant took us by surprise, because a variant was expected. The NHS had sought to plan ahead; the rest of the Government clearly had not.

I do not want to hear today from the Government—I am sorry to be stern about this—about what has gone on that is to be applauded: the Oak National Academy, BBC provision, and Google, Microsoft, Amazon Web Services and others putting on learning options. Much of that learning also has to be focused and directed by teachers, and it has to be accessible. To do that, we need laptops and broadband sufficient for every child, not

every household, because every child has to be online and has to be able to learn for as many hours as they need.

We need an honest and clear conversation about what is not going well, and how the Government need to tackle the remaining gaps at the speed and scale needed. First, the Government must have a proper plan to support hybrid and remote learning, because this issue is not going away. There has to be a long-term and sustainable solution for the provision of laptops and devices to all children who need them. That includes the broadband connectivity that will be required not just during the lockdown, but on an ongoing basis. The virus is going to be with us for at least this year and maybe well into the next academic year.

When I say every child, I mean every primary and secondary school pupil. It may be that they cannot get access because a sibling is using the home computer or laptop to study, or a parent might be using it to work at home. Those are the same families that might have used free wi-fi in libraries but, under the current circumstances and conditions, cannot do so. Children are also on cycles of lockdown and self-isolation. We have seen that all the way through since September. As many as 20% could have been off in one day due to the need to self-isolate.

Catching up is also vital, and I congratulate the Sutton Trust and others on the work they have done. Research by the National Foundation for Educational Research showed that at the start of last term, poorer pupils were three months behind on their learning, showing that the digital divide plays a huge part in poorer children falling behind. As well as keeping up, they also have to catch up. They need the time to be able to study in order to do that.

Secondly, laptop support must be at scale and of quality. I am surprised at the number of complaints from teachers about the spec and quality of laptops they have received, and the difficulties they had in reimaging them and getting their children online. Will the Minister outline the quality of provision the Government are providing, the tests and criteria they have set out, and how they are monitoring complaints received from schools, in order that those issues can be ironed out for further cycles?

The benefits are clear and it is heartening to read what children have to say. Last April, in the gap between the start of lockdown and laptops starting to arrive, local charity Hounslow's Promise started a scheme to secure business and individual donations of laptops. That project is ongoing, working with the Hounslow Education Partnership of headteachers.

I want to quote Victoria Eadie, chief executive officer of the Tudor Park Trust, who has worked on the project from the start:

"During the first lockdown when we rolled out the first computers in April we saw significantly increased engagement in learning by pupils who previously had no access... They went from no engagement to medium or full engagement. It made a huge difference."

The feedback from young people has also had an impact and has led to the project continuing. One pupil said:

"Before I received a laptop from school, I was struggling to complete work that was being sent by post. This meant it was difficult for me to complete my work and receive feedback. Once I

received my laptop it was easier to do my work and access help online. I am very grateful for the laptop; my mum is also very grateful as my little brother also uses it for his learning."

Another pupil said:

"It has been absolutely brilliant. I was stressed because I couldn't do the work as I only had my phone. Now I can do the home learning."

A third pupil said:

"This is a life saver because I travel between mum and dad and this makes it possible for me to keep up with my schoolwork in either home."

Thirdly, we need a proper plan for connectivity. We need to tackle data poverty. That is not an unknown inequality, yet it is another social injustice that the pandemic has shone a light on, dividing rich and poor, and haves and have nots, whether young or old. Children who are unable to learn from and with their parents are learning far more slowly than their peers.

I believe there is a lot more to do to ensure that there is a sustainable solution. I appreciate and am grateful for the support from Three and others, which are now coming together with the Government to provide some free access to broadband during this period, but there has to be a solution that is ongoing and sustainable. We need a proper national schools connectivity scheme at low or no cost, so that schools can be confident that they will be able to support all their pupils to get online.

This is indeed an unsettling time for children, and it would be hugely beneficial and easily achievable for tech firms and broadband suppliers to help children stay connected to their school and their friends. Not only will it support their learning; it will positively impact on their confidence and wellbeing.

Dame Angela Eagle (in the Chair): I warn everybody that there are drop-outs from the call list, so the next person I will call to speak is Kate Osborne. First, I call Tracy Brabin.

10.5 am

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Angela, especially as it is your first time in the Chair—your opening night. It is a real pleasure to be here. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) for securing this timely and important debate. I must say that it was unclear whether we were going to have the debate, but for the sake of my young constituents who are struggling with home learning, I am grateful that we went ahead.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the teachers, the teaching assistants, the heads, the parents, the BBC and others for their fantastic online lessons—all supporting our children to get an education during this new lockdown. Teachers have had to redesign lesson plans at the last minute and get to grips with a new way of teaching, while maintaining standards. Although many children are still going to school—the children of key workers and others—there are thousands back at home with their parents, potentially without resources to learn.

We know that the digital divide is real, and the lockdown has identified that inequality. Many of the most disadvantaged children rely on schools and libraries to access the internet. With those closed, children and young people are now struggling to get online. The need is urgent, and I reiterate the point made by the Sutton

[Tracy Brabin]

Trust: just one in 10 schools across the country says that its pupils have access to technology. It is urgent, and it is a crisis.

As a young girl growing up on a council estate in Batley, on free school meals, I definitely would have been one of those youngsters who did not have the tech. I know the impact it would have had on my prospects. This is about lost potential. I definitely would not be standing in this place if I had had to scramble around for tech or share a mobile phone with my sister, my mum and my dad. This is a crisis for this generation.

Only last night, I received an email from Andrew Barker, a parent at my old school, Windmill Primary School, which is an outstanding, excellent school with great leadership. He asked whether I could help him and other parents source 20 recycled, used or spare devices for children who might not have access at home to learning and the devices to support it. Andrew, a software company owner, has also offered his tech support to help the school and teachers. I thank him and so many other parents around the country who are using their skills to support teachers—something that is desperately needed. As we have just heard, Ofcom and SHINE, the Leeds-based charity, have said that 1.78 million children lack access to a laptop, desktop computer or tablet. That is a seriously depressing number, given that children were already lagging behind their peers before covid. Now, after five months of missed education, they will be even further behind.

It is not just about the tech, is it? It is also about supporting the educators, the teachers, the teaching assistants and the mums, dads and carers, many of whom may not be natural teachers or may have a job to do at home while also trying to home school their children. They will need support. Leaving pupils without tech and their parents without support means the deprivation gap will only widen. Kids will suffer not just in terms of their education, prospects and future; potentially, their mental health will suffer too. A telling admission of failure was when the Education Secretary told children that if they did not have laptops at home, they could go to school, whereas the Government's plan was to close schools to all children except vulnerable children and those of key workers.

Of course, the pledge to deliver 750,000 laptops to families without a suitable device is extremely welcome, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating—those children should have had them already. We cannot forget either that Government deliveries to special schools have not been fit for purpose. The Government have offered desktop computers to children who are not mobile and able to use desktops. Those children need tablets or smaller devices.

Councils around the country have had to step in where the Government have failed to deliver. My local authority, Kirklees, has distributed 3,857 devices since lockdown, but it decided that that was just not enough and allocated its own substantial funds to deliver tech for schools.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): It is not only councils that have stepped up to the plate, but community organisations in every region and

constituency—none more so than the Dons Local Action Group, the AFC Wimbledon supporters who have supplied more than 1,000 laptops during the lockdown.

Tracy Brabin: There is no greater champion of access to tech than my hon. Friend. We are all enormously grateful for the work she has done, the letters she has written and the pressure she has put on the Government, so I thank her for that.

This is absolutely about social mobility. There is a correlation between children being on free school meals and their access to tech. There are more than 62,113 children on free school meals across West Yorkshire, so it is evident that the need is great, but it did not have to be that way. The Education Secretary and his Department knew that this crisis was coming. The Minister will probably point to the mutation, which caught us all by surprise, but another lockdown was predictable and scientists raised the alarm long before the new variant was identified.

Our children need care, but they also need resources. Our families need practical support. Schools need timely, realistic guidelines. We need an Education Secretary who is on top of his brief, but so far we have seen the Government continue to fail the children of Batley and Spen and West Yorkshire, whose futures and destinies depend on their leadership.

10.12 am

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Dame Angela, and I congratulate you on your damehood. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) for securing this important debate.

I pay tribute to all the schools in my constituency and to the two local authorities, South Tyneside and Gateshead Councils, which reacted quickly to ensure that children and families are as supported as possible during the latest schools closure. I of course pay tribute to all the parents and carers, including my wife, who are home schooling their children at this very difficult time.

However, schools and families still face huge challenges in ensuring that every student has individual access to reliable and high-quality digital devices and the internet. This is, of course, not a new issue. The digital divide existed prior to the pandemic and left many children struggling to complete homework. The pandemic has highlighted the digital divide and other inequalities on a national scale, and effective action must now be taken to address that wide-reaching educational inequality.

Although this debate about digital exclusion among young people, alongside other things, is vital, let us not be in any doubt that it alone will deal with the deep-seated inequalities that having no face-to-face teaching creates. Online is no substitute for many, which is why it is vital that the Government ensure that pupils have guaranteed face-to-face contact time with their teachers online. Research conducted by the Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East in May 2020 showed that school closures further exposed and exacerbated the gaps in education caused by low income, and left children unable to access or engage in learning because they did not have adequate resources or an appropriate set-up at home.

It seems a long time ago now that a demand for everyone in the UK to have a right to access the internet, irrespective of income, was considered by some to be “broadband communism”. Fast forward a year and many children across the country are not able to gain access to laptops and the internet when it is so desperately needed. That is no surprise when Ofcom estimates that between 1.14 million and 1.78 million children in the UK—around 9%—do not have home access to a laptop, desktop or tablet, and more than 880,000 children live in a household with only a mobile internet connection.

Matt Western: My hon. Friend is making a very powerful point. Does she agree that, with the closure of so many libraries in our communities, we easily forget just how important access to information and knowledge is, and how so many in our communities are being isolated from that access? That is why the provision my hon. Friend is describing is so crucial.

Kate Osborne: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Libraries are so important to our communities.

In June 2020, the National Education Union, the Labour party and others called on the Government to urgently address the digital divide and provide laptops for all pupils who needed one. Seven months on, that has not been properly addressed. How long does it take to order and distribute laptops?

Delivering devices alone does not fully address the issue of connectivity, with 880,000 children and young people living in a home with only a mobile internet connection. Schools have reported that take-up of additional SIM cards has been low among families in certain areas. Even with mobile companies expanding data plans, this still means that children’s learning is dependent on phone reception, which can often be unreliable or slow. That is preventing children and pupils from fully participating in lessons.

The Government’s decision to cut school laptop allocations in October last year—a decision that was fortunately eventually reversed—combined with schools previously being able to request laptops only for isolating pupils, left many schools and pupils unprepared and without the right resources to move quickly into an extended period of remote learning. Echoing much of the Government’s handling of the pandemic, this has been a story of dither, delay and indecision, and it is our children who are now paying the price. I agree with the Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East that the Government must commit to rapidly increasing the distribution timetable for the 440,000 purchased devices that are currently available to schools and ensure that every child across the country has access to a device for learning and other essential items.

The CPAG and CNE have outlined some very basic ways in which the Government could achieve that goal. First, the number of devices schools can apply for should be increased, enabling them to meet the needs of their school communities. Cash grants could be provided to parents to allow them to purchase the ICT equipment that is needed—not just laptops, but wi-fi, printers, printer ink, paper and so on—so that pupils can learn from home. Child benefit could be increased by at least £10 a week to ensure that families have enough money to meet the additional financial pressures placed on them as a result of children learning at home. Will the Minister commit to those reasonable requests, to ensure

that no child is further disadvantaged by forces that are completely out of their control? Nearly one year on since the start of the crisis, the Government’s failure to deliver the digital resources for school children’s learning must not continue at this critical point in their lives.

Finally, I will turn to free school meals. I echo the concerns so eloquently outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington, and add that, surely, the easiest way to ensure that children, through their parents, receive the full level of their allowance for free school meals is to use vouchers. That will allow parents to make sure that the food given to their children is nutritious and balanced and that it is food their children will eat. It will also mean that unscrupulous companies no longer benefit at the expense of our children—literally taking food from their mouths.

10.20 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I would need longer than the next few minutes to express my anger at the Government’s shambolic provision of remote education for schools, but I hope that I have long enough to propose three immediate, practical, tangible actions.

The first is zero-rating, which is a mechanism to make a website freely accessible, even if the user is without data. I congratulate BT, Three, Vodafone and O2 on their work on zero-rating the Oak National Academy, and particularly BT on its work to zero-rate BBC Bitesize. The Minister must urgently encourage all other providers to follow suit.

The second is data. Families streaming online lessons on pay-as-you-go can expect charges as astronomical as £37 a day, so I welcome the free data offered by the biggest providers, but the devil is in the detail. While they are offering unlimited data to all customers in need, Sky Mobile’s offer is limited to 1,800 customers and they have to be on a monthly contract. I say to the Minister that someone’s contract cannot be boosted if they do not have a contract in the first place. The families without connectivity are not on monthly contracts. They pay as they go. Where is the offer from the likes of Giffgaff, Lebara, Lyca and Asda Mobile? We are beginning to understand that poorer people pay their bills differently. Just as they pay their gas and electricity on a key charging meter, they pay for their connectivity on a pay-as-you-go basis.

I offer all hon. Members in this debate a table that Harry and Dan in my office have put together of all the offers by all the companies. It shows that companies that overwhelmingly provide services to poorer people on pay-as-you-go make no offer at all. Even though some of the leading companies make great offers to people on contracts, they make no offers to people on pay-as-you-go.

The third action is on devices and dongles, because no matter how many websites are zero-rated or how much data is offered, remote education remains completely inaccessible to the 1.78 million children without a device. And no matter how expensive, how smart or how modern the device distributed, it is educationally useless if it comes without the data or dongle needed to connect from home. Why on earth have just 40,000 routers been delivered? In a country with free state education, how is it acceptable for remote education to be dependent on a lottery of support and for the Good Law Project to

[*Siobhain McDonagh*]

have to resort to legal action due to the poorest parents having to choose between their child's education and their family's health? If they do not have data or computers, they go to school.

So many Members have referred to the research from the Sutton Trust and Teach First. Just 10% of teachers report that all their students have adequate access to a device—just 5% of teachers in state schools, compared with 54% in private schools. Meanwhile, a principal in my constituency wrote to me only yesterday to tell me that an astonishing 350 children at her secondary school had to share a device in the household. I rang her to confirm, because I thought I had misunderstood. Unfortunately, I had not.

I welcome zero-rating and I thank those networks stepping up to boost contracts, but ultimately nothing replaces a teacher teaching their own pupils. It is utterly unjust that that is available to all but the poorest pupils on the wrong side of the digital divide. Every pupil receiving a laptop in the weeks ahead is a child that has been failed in the six months that they were off school without one. The Minister knows that the number provided still does not meet the need, and tens of thousands of other children will be without the connectivity they require to use the device in the first place. Stop passing the buck on to schools and teachers, and provide the data and dongles urgently needed, so that no child's education is dependent on their internet connection.

10.25 am

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): May I congratulate you, Dame Angela, on your recognition in the new year's honours? It was richly deserved. It is a genuine pleasure to serve with you in the Chair. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) for securing this really important debate. It says a huge amount about the concern that people have about the state of education in our country at the moment that Members have travelled from right across the country to participate in this debate because it is so important. I, too, thank the House authorities for facilitating this sitting. I hope that sense will prevail and that we can find a way to have virtual participation in Westminster Hall as well as the main Chamber.

Members will know how strongly I feel about where we have got to in the education response to this pandemic and the serious challenges facing children and young people across the country, as well as parents, educators, staff and schools, who have bust a gut throughout the year to keep children learning. I am angry because it did not need to be this way. We have always said that closing schools ought to be a last resort. They should be the last to close and the first to reopen. We reached that last resort because of the Government's failure to manage the public health crisis.

What are the lessons here? Being too slow to act leads to greater cost overall. We have seen that in terms of lives and livelihoods, and we are now seeing it clearly in terms of learning. Unless we act quickly and decisively, we all pay a greater price. It is outrageous that children and young people across the country, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, will suffer the most.

We all agree that school is the best place for children to be. That is the view of not only hon. Members who are passionate about education, but every single teacher and member of support staff across the country. Indeed, even when they were warning the Government that schools were no longer a safe place for pupils to be if we wanted to manage and contain the spread of the virus, every single union representing teaching staff, school leaders and support staff made it clear that school is the best place for children and young people to be, and we need to get on top of this virus to get them back there as quickly and safely as possible.

As we know from the Children's Commissioner and from Ofsted, and from all the evidence from the first lockdown, that when children and young people are not in school, it is particularly the most vulnerable children we are concerned about. Even with reports of high numbers of children and young people still turning up to school this week and last week, we know that children from the most vulnerable and at-risk backgrounds are still failing to show, with serious concerns flagged for social services.

Even for children not from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, this has not been an easy time; in fact, it has been a very challenging time, as any parent would agree who is trying to juggle their work and their responsibilities around the home with educating their children at the same time. If ever there was a time to be grateful for teachers, it is right now, and parents across the country are appreciating first hand that teaching is not an easy job

Children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are the most excluded. That is what makes the Government's failure to prepare for remote learning inexplicable and inexcusable. It is not only their competence that is in question, but their values and their ambition for pupils across the country. We know from Ofcom that around 1.8 million children are without a device to study from at home, and around 880,000 children live in households with only a mobile internet connection, with all the challenges that that presents. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne), who has been an outstanding champion in highlighting the digital divide, made that clear in her powerful speech.

Why was it not a national priority to get every child online? Why did the Department for Education have a target of providing only 230,000 laptops by the end of June last year, and, worse still, why was that target missed? We now know that 700,000 laptops have been delivered in total—100,000 of them this week, so the pace is picking up. The Government have committed to 1.3 million in total, but when will those be delivered? Why does the summit of the Government's ambition still fall short of delivering for the 1.8 million children whom we know are without a device in the home? Only 54,500 4G routers and 9,930 wi-fi vouchers had been delivered by Christmas. Why? How is that acceptable?

We know that children cannot get online. Why are we relying on the goodwill of mobile phone providers to help their customers, because that is clearly not working? As my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) said, many of them are not even bothering to try to help their customers, so where does that leave those children from the poorest and most disadvantaged backgrounds?

Why is it that, even at the start of this term, we had reports that families and schools had not been able to order laptops for primary school pupils? Why is it that sixth-formers were not also given priority for laptops but put at the bottom of the pile? As the research published by the Sutton Trust and Teacher Tapp shows, just 10% of teachers report that all their pupils have access to a device, and that proportion has barely shifted across the entirety of the pandemic. We know that what the Government have been doing has fallen well short of the need of our children and young people.

The digital divide, of course, is not new. If one thing must come out of the pandemic, it should be an understanding that access to online services, education, resources and entertainment cannot be restricted only to those from comfortable or well-off backgrounds; everyone needs to benefit. My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) raised the digital divide. There are plenty of examples of local authorities, such as Hounslow and others, that have grasped the nettle and worked hard to get their local families and citizens online. What will the Government do in the wake of the pandemic genuinely to tackle the digital divide and to ensure that we get not only every child online, but every family?

I am also really concerned about the support available for special schools. For obvious reasons, being open to their pupils presents all sorts of challenges for the safety of both the staff and the young people they serve. I know, from speaking to the heads of special schools in my constituency and across the country, that they have not felt supported by the Government, they have not felt funded by the Government, and they certainly have not felt trusted by the Government. The Government need to focus on and prioritise the provision in special schools, and to trust headteachers to make sensible decisions about managing the flows of children and young people in their school, making assessments about risk and vulnerability and ensuring that children receive the support they need—a point made well by my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin).

Getting every child online is about access not just to kit but to high-quality teaching. I recognise that the Government have put in place a remote learning framework, but there is a lack of understanding of how digital education can best be delivered. It is not always about live lessons, although I know that many schools have done a great job in providing continuous online provision; it is about giving people access to high-quality lessons, which can be delivered by brilliant providers such as the Oak National Academy and the BBC, and, crucially, following up with good-quality contact time with a teacher, as my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow said in her fantastic speech. That has been somewhat overlooked by the metrics in the framework.

Siobhain McDonagh: Was my hon. Friend as shocked as I was that the Secretary of State, when making his statement last week, suggested that parents who were unhappy with the remote learning their schools were providing should complain to Ofsted?

Wes Streeting: Well, that really does bring me on to the final section of my speech, which is about the performance of the Education Secretary and his leadership. I thought it was appalling, actually, to announce on the Floor of the House to parents across the land that if

they were dissatisfied they should pick up the phone and ring Ofsted, without even speaking to Ofsted first. Its inboxes have been absolutely flooded, and no doubt its phones are ringing off the hook—interestingly, not so much with people ringing to complain, but with parents horrified at the heavy-handed treatment of the Government ringing to say, “I want to say thank you for the work that my school and the teachers are doing.”

There has to be a focus on standards. I strongly agree with what the right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) said about the importance of education, and of consistently high-quality education. I have heard from young people themselves examples of where the standard has fallen well short of what is provided by other schools. We should make no bones about challenging that, but the Government have to support schools to provide that high-quality education.

The truth is that, while schools have bust a gut for their pupils throughout this crisis, the Secretary of State for Education has either been missing in action or actively harmful to the work that schools have been doing. He was too slow to act on funding and support, so headteachers in particular had difficult decisions to make about the funding of safety measures versus the funding of ongoing learning and teaching, particularly in the context of rising staff costs because of regular staff having to self-isolate and the need to recruit more expensive supply cover.

It is also about the lack of planning and preparation. The Opposition recognise, and have always recognised, that lots of challenges are thrown up by this pandemic that make Ministers’ lives really difficult, but when someone is a Secretary of State, particularly in a crisis like this, when they have all sorts of things coming at them and their Department, it is their job to sit around the Cabinet table, listen to what is going on, understand the spread of the virus and the challenges it poses for their Department, and look ahead, forward plan, scan the horizon, and think: “What do I need to do now to make sure that the interests governed by my Department aren’t harmed further than they need to be? What action can I take to mitigate?”

The truth is that too often the Secretary of State has not had a plan A, let alone a plan B. That was clear in the case of exams. Right now, children and young people need to know what they are working towards and they still do not. Even with the letter published this morning to Ofqual and the evidence that the Secretary of State has given to the Select Committee on Education, they still do not know quite what they are working towards.

This is a Secretary of State who announced—in fact, I think the Prime Minister gazumped him; I am not even sure that the Secretary of State knew what was going on—that exams were to be cancelled in the week when pupils were sitting BTEC exams. It is almost as if the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister had never heard of BTECs, but pupils and students were going off to sit their BTECs, wondering on one evening whether they would be invited to turn up at school or college the next day.

It seemed to me that it was only when the Government were reminded that BTECs existed that they thought to say something about it. Even then it was not a clear direction; it was up to schools and colleges. What chaos! We said to the Government long before Christmas,

[*Wes Streeting*]

“You need a plan A for exams to go ahead, and they need to go ahead fairly. We know it’s difficult, but you need to try to mitigate the amount of lost learning.”

Seema Malhotra: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Wes Streeting: I am probably a bit short of time. Is it okay, Dame Angela?

Ms Angela Eagle (in the Chair): You can give way. It is entirely up to you.

Wes Streeting: I will give way just once, in that case.

Seema Malhotra: My hon. Friend is making a very important point about the chaos and confusion caused at the time of the BTEC exams in January. I had three schools that each told me something different. The first told me that it had stopped the exams, the second that they were going ahead, and the third that it was asking children to choose whether they wanted to sit them. That is utter chaos for secondary schools, all within one constituency.

Wes Streeting: I strongly agree, and it was desperately unfair on students. I think we all remember the stress of exams, however long ago they were. I cannot imagine what those students—who, on the eve of an exam for which they were preparing, were not even sure whether it would take place—have been through. It seemed that BTEC students were a total afterthought, but frankly so were all other students across the country. We said to the Government, clearly, “You need a plan A for exams to go ahead, and to go ahead fairly, but it may be, through circumstances beyond your control and the spread of the virus, that they can’t happen, so you need a plan B.”

What we see now, after the Prime Minister cancelled exams, is that not only was plan A deficient, but there was no plan B in existence. Only now are the Government scrambling to make it right. We had a hasty announcement from the Secretary of State before Christmas that there would be a working group to look at the inequalities and the challenges presented for sitting exams. That work has probably been overtaken somewhat by subsequent announcements. The fact is that we never saw the working group, never saw the membership and never saw the terms of reference. I am not sure it met. I am not sure whether it still exists or whether it is due to report. The point is that the Secretary of State should have been announcing the results, the recommendations and the actions from such a working group before Christmas, not simply announcing that he was setting one up.

Free school meals have also been an afterthought for the Government throughout the pandemic. They had to be shamed into action not just by Opposition politicians and, indeed, politicians on the Government side, but by Marcus Rashford and food poverty campaigners, yet we see just this week a repeat of the exact same debacle that we saw last March, so it is not just the case that the Government are making mistakes and oversights and are not on top of support for some of the most vulnerable children. They do not even learn from their mistakes; they just go on repeating them.

As for school closures—goodness me, Dame Angela. We have all accepted how important it is to keep schools open and to have a plan in place to achieve that. Let us

just rattle through the timeline. In the final week of term, the Government were threatening to sue local authorities that were warning us that the virus was out of control and they needed support. The Secretary of State could have just picked up the phone. The Prime Minister said on 21 December that he wanted to keep schools open and they would reopen at the start of January. A plan—if we can call it a plan—was released on the last day of term for the roll-out of mass testing. Then, on 30 December, there was an announcement that primary schools in some areas would not reopen as planned. On 31 December, the Education Secretary was saying that he was “absolutely confident” that there would be no further delays in reopening, which should have been a clue that there absolutely would be. The very next day, the Secretary of State announced that all London primary schools, not just those in certain parts of the city, would remain shut to most pupils at the start of term.

On 3 January, parents were told to send primary school age children back to schools, which remained open despite growing calls to close them. Then the very next day, it was announced that they were closed, which I can tell the Minister was an absolute pain in the backside for parents who often get grandparents involved in supporting their caring responsibilities, as many grandparents said, “I’m really sorry. I would love to help, but I can’t—they’ve been back at school for a day.”

It is a total and utter shambles—the lack of forward planning, the lack of thinking ahead and the lack of any consideration about the impact that Ministers’ decisions have on the schools, the parents and the pupils, the children and young people, who have been victims of those decisions. There has been no consideration whatever.

I want to conclude by saying that, very self-evidently, this is not good enough. We have to ask serious questions about how it is, after this litany of failure, the Secretary of State is still in his office. It does not reflect well on the Prime Minister, who seems to cling to incompetence rather than challenging and tackling it. We have to be more ambitious. It should not just be the Government being ambitious for themselves and their own prospects; they should be more ambitious for our country. If we are not ambitious about the futures of children and young people, if we are not ambitious about getting every child online, and if we are not ambitious about having a national education recovery that seeks to repair the damage of more than a year of disruption to education, we really have to ask ourselves what on earth we are here for.

As the right hon. Member for Tatton said so powerfully in her speech, in so many ways throughout our history this country has led the world in the provision of education. We still have a great international reputation for the quality of our education, but there is a real risk that under the present leadership, without a serious change of course and a change in personnel, we will not see this country build on that proud history a brighter future for children and young people across the country. After the year of misery that they have had, I think we would all agree that they deserve so much better.

10.43 am

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): May I add to your embarrassment, Dame Angela, by adding my congratulations to you on your very well deserved

damehood, and say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship this morning? I congratulate also the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) on securing this debate.

Education is a national priority for this Government. That is why we have endeavoured to keep schools open throughout the pandemic. The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the inequality in education that existed even before the pandemic. That is why closing the attainment gap has been the driving force behind all our reforms in education since 2010, which had led to the attainment gap closing by 13% in primary schools and by 9% in secondary schools since 2011.

During this period of restricted attendance in schools, early years settings will remain open, as will schools for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. All schools and colleges in England have switched immediately to remote education for students who do not attend face-to-face provision. Preparations and expectations for that were set out in revised guidance last year.

Despite restricted attendance, lateral flow testing should continue for students and teachers who are attending schools, and from 4 January, rapid asymptomatic testing has been successfully rolled out for secondary schools and colleges, alongside weekly testing of staff and daily testing of close contacts for staff and pupils who test positive. That rapid testing programme will help to identify asymptomatic positive cases, and will further help to break the chain of transmission of the virus and minimise further disruption.

We recognise that teachers are under enormous pressure in dealing with the impact of covid-19 on their schools. I join the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington in paying tribute to staff in our schools for their enormous efforts since the beginning of the pandemic. We know that significant time in the classroom has been lost already, and that will continue as the pandemic continues. It is critical that we mitigate the impact on students of being out of school, through high-quality remote education. Most pupils are now receiving education remotely, and schools have made huge progress in developing their remote education provision, so it is right that we increase the expectations of what pupils receive.

In October, the Secretary of State issued a direction under the Coronavirus Act 2020, placing a legal duty on state-funded schools to provide remote education. In our July guidance, which was again updated last week, we set out clear expectations, including a requirement that schools provide between three and five hours of teaching a day, depending on the child's age. Schools are now expected to provide remote education that includes either recorded or live direct teaching.

Teachers and heads have gone to enormous lengths since March to improve the quality of remote education. Ofsted's report on visits to schools during the autumn term commended the increasing sophistication in schools' approaches to remote education. I would, of course, be delighted to discuss with my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) and the Blue Collar Conservatism group the future opportunities that online education can bring to our schools.

To support remote delivery, we are investing more than £400 million to support access to remote education and online social care. We have bought more than 1.3 million laptops and tablets, and by the end of this

week we will have delivered three quarters of a million devices, more than half a million of which had been delivered by December last year. That has been a huge procurement exercise: more than 1.3 million computers bought to order on the global market.

We have targeted support at those who need it most. On top of the 1.3 million computers, schools already have 1.9 million laptops of their own and an estimated 1 million tablets, all of which can be lent to their pupils. As the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) pointed out, we have partnered with mobile phone operators to deliver zero rating for the Oak National Academy and BBC Bitesize, and the free data uplifts for disadvantaged families. We are grateful to EE, O2, Sky Mobile, Smarty, Tesco Mobile, Three, Virgin Mobile and Vodafone. We continue to invite a range of mobile network operators to support the offer.

As every child and young person in the country has experienced unprecedented disruption to their education as a result of covid-19, they will need support to catch up, alongside remote education and the delivery of devices. The Government have introduced a catch-up package of £1 billion, including a catch-up premium of £650 million for all state-funded schools. Schools will be able to tailor the funding for specific circumstances and target the pupils who need it most. To support schools in making the best use of that money, the Education Endowment Foundation has published a covid-19 support guide for schools, with evidence-based approaches to catch-up for all students.

All schools should use their catch-up premium as a single total from which to prioritise support for all pupils, guided by individual need. That will often focus on pupils from deprived backgrounds, but will include other pupils, especially those facing challenges, such as those with a social worker, young carers, and those with mental health needs.

Alongside that, we have the £350 million national tutoring programme for disadvantaged pupils, which will increase access to high-quality tuition for the most disadvantaged young people, helping to accelerate their academic progress and tackling the attainment gap between them and their peers. The national tutoring programme for schools was launched in November 2020, and nearly 90,000 pupils are now confirmed to have enrolled in it. It is estimated that, this academic year, approximately 15,000 tutors will support the scheme, offering tuition to more than a quarter of a million pupils. During this academic year, the national tutoring programme is also providing funding to support small-group tuition for 16 to 19-year-olds and the improvement of early language skills for reception-age children.

We know that time out of the classroom affects disadvantaged children and young people most significantly, and the Government remain committed to ensuring that they continue to be supported. In March, we took the decision to continue to provide free school meals to eligible children while at home, and to extend that during the Easter holidays and the Whitsun half term. The national voucher scheme that we introduced has distributed some £380 million of vouchers for families, and with the prompting of Marcus Rashford we extended the voucher payments during the summer holiday, too.

During the current national lockdown, schools should continue to provide meal options for all pupils who are in school. Meals should be available free of charge to all

[Nick Gibb]

infant pupils and pupils who are eligible for free school meals who are in school. Furthermore, we are providing extra funding to schools to ensure that they continue to support eligible children who are at home. Schools can work with their school caterer to provide food parcels, or they can consider local arrangements, such as vouchers. Schools will be able to claim for reimbursement of those additional costs. The centrally funded national voucher scheme will reopen from next week to ensure that every eligible child can access free school meal support while schools are restricted from opening to all pupils.

The quality of the food in the photographs shared on social media is totally unacceptable and does not reflect the high standard of free school meals that we expect to be sent to children. Chartwells has rightly apologised and admitted that the parcels in question were not good enough. My colleague the children's Minister met its chief executive officer yesterday, and they assured her that they have taken immediate action to stop further deliveries of poor-quality parcels. Chartwells will ensure that the schools affected are compensated and provide additional food to the eligible children, in line with our increased funding.

Vulnerable children and young people are strongly encouraged to attend their school or college, but where a child does not attend, school absence will not be penalised. We expect schools to follow up attendance where absences are not related to covid-19, as they would normally do when schools are open. We have asked all social workers to strongly encourage those in care to attend school. Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school if required, and schools should speak to parents and carers to identify who needs to go to school. If critical workers can work from home and look after their children at the same time, they should do so.

We know that every school will have a different number of children of critical workers who need to attend, so it is important that on-site provision is provided for those pupils. There is no limit to the number of those pupils who can attend, and schools should not limit the attendance of those groups. That is because, as the hon. Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) said, we are reducing overall social contact across areas and the country, rather than individually by each institution.

The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) raised exams. We recognise that the decision to restrict access to schools means that primary assessment cannot go ahead as intended. We will therefore cancel the statutory key stages 1 and 2 tests and the teacher assessments planned for summer 2021, including the key stage 2 tests in reading and maths. We remain determined to ensure that every young person, no matter their age or background, is provided with the education and opportunities they deserve, despite the challenges faced by schools. We know that schools will continue to use assessment during the summer term to inform teaching to enable them to give the necessary information to parents.

Wes Streeting: As the Minister thinks about what the plan for assessments looks like, can he make sure that there is provision for private candidates to be assessed and awarded a grade? Many of them have been waiting for some time for some clarity on that.

Nick Gibb: Yes. That will be made clear in the exchange of letters between Ofqual and the Secretary of State this morning. The hon. Gentleman will see more detail of the proposals for private candidates in the consultation document that will be jointly published by Ofqual and the Department for Education this week.

Although exams are the fairest method we have of assessing what a student knows, we cannot guarantee that all students will be in a position to sit exams fairly this summer. That is why GCSEs, and A-level and AS-level exams, will not go ahead as planned this summer. We have confirmed that we will use a form of teacher-assessed grades, with training and support provided by exam boards, to ensure that they are awarded fairly and consistently. This week Ofqual and the Department for Education will, as I have said, publish a consultation document setting out the details of the proposed arrangements for awarding grades. We have been working on those proposals for many months in anticipation that we would be in the position we are now in. There are similar proposals in relation to vocational and technical qualifications, but they are varied and different forms of assessment, and we have a separate consultation on that, to be published this week as well.

To give the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington time to respond, I will conclude by saying that we have taken the steps I have described to help to mitigate the impact of covid-19 on pupils. The measures will ensure that they can continue to have access to a high-quality education and that we shall continue to close the attainment gap across the country. I again thank and pay tribute to all our dedicated teachers, school and college leaders, and support staff for the extraordinary work that they are doing to help to minimise the impact of this terrible pandemic on the education and life chances of their pupils.

10.56 am

Matt Western: I thank everyone who has participated in today's debate, in incredibly difficult circumstances. It is clearly an important debate, and the fact that we have been able to hold it is testament to the need for it. I guess we all share some frustration when the Chambers are not available to us, and about not holding the Government to account. The Minister is a decent person, and will understand that the concerns of the right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey), for example, are constructive. They may be critical, but we want the best for our children and communities. That is why it is so important to have such debates.

I want to give particular recognition to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who has done such sterling leadership work on child poverty and in the education sector. I thank her, having listened to her speak in the Chamber many times. She leads the way on many fronts and is worthy of special recognition.

I shall not go through the individual contributions, but I reiterate my thanks for Members' participation and for so many important points. I will perhaps summarise just two areas. On free school meals, I understand the Minister's point about Chartwells and the meeting that took place yesterday, but when businesses apologise, those apologies can be cheap. There are serious amounts of money involved, and profiteering is going on to the detriment of the children and families involved. I urge that the National Audit Office and Public Accounts

Committee should look at the issue. It is a scandal, and a blemish on the work that the Minister is doing—as the Department. I hold the Minister in good regard, but it is right that the matter should be looked at most carefully.

I want to focus on the issue of laptops and digital access. There is poverty in many parts of our modern lives, but in this day and age the idea that the sixth wealthiest nation should have digital poverty and exclusion seems quite wrong. I think back, and perhaps I can put the matter simply by framing it in this way: for a child not to have an exercise book provided by the school, or access to a textbook in class, would be wrong. The school would not allow it. We have to think differently and recognise that digital access through the internet and broadband is crucial—laptops and digital access. Therefore, it should be mandatory for the Government to provide them to every child in our schools.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered support for pupils' education during school closures.

Dame Angela Eagle (in the Chair): Will Members please leave promptly by the exit door on the left, while observing social distancing?

10.59 am

Sitting suspended.

Rivers: Discharges

Dame Angela Eagle (in the Chair): May I remind Members they are strongly encouraged to wear a face covering when they are not speaking?

11.1 am

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered discharges into rivers.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Angela. I am pleased to have the opportunity today to discuss the issue of discharges into rivers.

My constituency of Blaydon is bounded on the north by the River Tyne, and on the south and west by the River Derwent, which marks the border with County Durham. Across the constituency, there are other inland waterways, including the River Tees. Our long industrial history has, over the years, taken its toll on our rivers, but thankfully much work has been done to make our rivers cleaner and more pleasant.

As I walk along the Keelman's Way, alongside the River Tyne, from Clara Vale, past Ryton and Stella, to Blaydon, the river is tidal at that point. In less difficult times than the present, it is a real pleasure to see so many people enjoying the river, watching the wildlife, looking out for the seals and rowing on the river, from the rowing clubs that have grown up alongside the riverbank. At Blackhall Mill, on the County Durham border, there are green and pleasant riverbanks, enjoyed by the community.

Although Blaydon is not a coastal constituency, we can see how our rivers flow into the sea, and the vital link between the health of our local waterways and the health of our seas and oceans. Not far away from us, we have wonderful coastal beaches, so keeping our rivers clean and healthy, and free from sewage, is important to us.

Last year, I was shocked to see, in information circulated by Surfers Against Sewage, the number of discharges of sewage into rivers all over the country through combined sewage overflows. Many were permitted, but many were accidental. As Surfers Against Sewage say:

“CSOs are emergency infrastructure assets permitted to discharge untreated wastewater.”

CSOs are permitted to work only under periods defined in the original EU urban wastewater directive as “unusually heavy rainfall.” Surfers Against Sewage go on to say:

“CSOs are an essential part of our sewage infrastructure designed to prevent sewage backing up into homes when there is an extreme rainfall event.”

However, recent research by many organisations has shown that the water companies are using these CSOs alarmingly frequently. *The Guardian* found that water companies discharged raw sewage into the UK's rivers 200,000 times in 2019. Surfers Against Sewage's “2020 Water Quality” report shows that there were 2,523 coastal CSO discharges recorded in England and 387 coastal discharges in Wales between October 2019 and September 2020.

Research undertaken by the World Wildlife Fund in 2017 shows that 8% to 14% of overflows are spilling sewage into rivers at least once a week, and between a third and a half at least once a month. Continued

[Liz Twist]

population growth and more extreme events caused by climate change will only increase the pressure on existing infrastructure.

Research undertaken by the Rivers Trust in my constituency mapped the locations where combined sewer overflows, operated by Northumbrian Water, have discharged into water courses in the constituency or in upstream catchment areas, which flow into the rivers Tyne and Derwent. The Rivers Trust research shows that in 2018 there were 109 storm overflows, with 1,383 spills. The duration of spill hours was 3,219, with the worst performing site for spill duration being Hamsterley Mill pumping station's Riverview CSO, discharging 56 spills over 539 hours into the Derwent.

That is sewage flowing into our rivers, reducing our water quality and ability to safely enjoy our inland waterways. An increasing number of people across the UK, and in my constituency in particular, are using our waterways for recreational purposes, whether that be swimming, kayaking or canoeing. That they should be partaking in activities in water of low quality is a major public and ecological health concern. The larger the amount of discharge, the larger the likelihood of contracting viruses or harmful illnesses, and the presence of antimicrobial-resistant bacteria.

It is not right or acceptable. We need to find new and effective ways to stop CSOs and discharges into rivers. We must also find better ways of improving our sewerage infrastructure, so that sewage cannot back up into homes when we have extreme rainfall events. That is why I welcome the Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill, a private Member's Bill tabled by the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne), which is due for its Second Reading on 22 January, although I fear it may be lost, following our deferred vote later today. That is why I am especially pleased that I am able to speak about it now.

The Bill would place a duty on water companies to ensure that untreated sewage is no longer discharged into England's inland waters. It would require water companies to set out plans to progressively reduce their reliance on combined sewer overflows. It would also ensure increased transparency, as firms would be mandated to report publicly on the number, condition and quality of the sewage discharged from CSOs and any other sewage catchment assets.

In addition, the proposed new law would require the Government to investigate further steps that can be taken by stakeholders, such as the Environment Agency, to improve water quality. That could include designating at least two inland bathing waters every year to drive forward standards and set legally binding targets to increase the number of bathing waters classified as good or excellent.

Until we have such a law, it is right for each one of us to work with our local water companies and other stakeholders to press for improvements locally. I am pleased to say that, on receiving the information from Surfers Against Sewage last year, I contacted the chief executive of Northumbrian Water, Heidi Mottram, to raise my concerns about discharges affecting the rivers in my constituency. At the end of last year, I met with officers of Northumbrian Water and Ceri Gibson, chief

executive of the Tyne Rivers Trust, to discuss the current position locally and to look at how they could reduce the number of discharges.

Northumbrian Water is already working to reduce these incidents, and I was very glad to hear of further plans to work towards zero discharges. I thank Northumbrian Water for its positive approach to our discussions and the commitment to work further on reducing discharges, and I will continue to follow up on this issue. I know that my constituents who take a keen interest in environmental issues will also be looking out for further progress. I thank Ceri Gibson, chief executive of Tyne Rivers Trust, for her help and look forward to working with her, and the trust, in the future.

At this stage, I want to mention Northumbrian Water's "Bin the wipe" campaign, because what we put down the loo makes a difference to our sewerage system and to what is discharged into our rivers and seas. Too many wet wipes and other items are claimed to be flushable, but while they may flush away from our loos, they are not biodegradable. They create huge problems in the sewerage system, contribute to the growth of fatbergs and cause problems down the line. These days, we are probably all using many kinds of wipes to sanitise our work places and stations, so it is important that we get the "Bin the wipe" message over. I invite the Minister to join me. It is part of the broader issue of CSOs too.

The Environment Agency has an important part to play in dealing with CSOs, of course. Many of these incidents are permitted. The Environment Agency has a responsibility to follow up on incidents and to take action to reduce and eliminate CSOs, permitted or not. That is why it was worrying to read about Environment Agency funding concerns in *The Times* on 28 December.

"The state of the environment in England is getting worse and waste criminals are taking advantage of a lack of enforcement to dump pollutants, the Environment Agency has admitted in a letter to the environment secretary. Emma Howard Boyd, the agency's chairwoman, wrote to George Eustice in August saying that more people and businesses were failing to be prevented from breaking the law and that serious pollution incidents had risen. She said the agency's 'capacity to visit and tackle polluting businesses is now significantly reduced' and that it 'now has only the resources to attend the most serious environmental incidents'. Key indicators of environmental health are flatlining or deteriorating, with serious incidents up 27 per cent between 2017 and 2018, she said. The letter, obtained under freedom of information laws, also said that 'water company performance, which had been improving for most of the last decade, has now gone into reverse, with more pollution incidents last year than in previous years, for which we and the government are being increasingly heavily criticised'."

What are the Government doing to ensure that the Environment Agency is properly funded to play its part in reducing CSOs and to carry out the rest of its hugely important work?

I was also concerned to read in *The Independent* last year of a speech made by the chief executive of the Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan, who in August called for less rigorous measures to determine water quality in England's rivers, lakes and beaches after Brexit, which he said would allow the Government to classify more water bodies as high standard. Where are the Government in all of this? We need to hold water companies to account. We are in a climate and ecological emergency and our biodiversity is in a dire situation. With COP26 coming up, we need bold leadership and action, not to crawl back on standards.

Here are my asks of the Minister. First, end sewage discharges into rivers. It is high time we put an end to this practice and improve the water quality of our rivers. Will she require all water companies to take real action to resolve this issue? Secondly, increase funding to the Environment Agency to properly monitor, investigate and take enforcement action on any incidents. Thirdly, commit to not watering down environmental regulations—we need to up our ambitions for improving our environment, not lower standards. Fourthly, we have to change the approach taken by the Government and regulators to future environmental challenges if we are to meet them. Fifthly, as Northumbrian Water says, we have to “Bin the wipe”. We must create enforceable standards, so that manufacturers cannot make misleading claims, and in the meantime make sure the public know that flushable does not mean biodegradable.

In this year of COP26, we should really be making an effort to improve water quality in our rivers and oceans. I hope the Government will rise to the challenge.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): It is a pleasure to be here with you this morning, Dame Angela, albeit with a very small crowd. I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) on securing the debate on this important issue. She painted a fine picture of her constituency—the River Tyne, the wonderful wildlife and the value that they have for local people, especially at this time. People now realise how important our river landscapes can be for our health and wellbeing. I thank her for bringing this subject to us, because water quality is dear to my heart. As the Environment Minister, I am doing a great deal of work on it, particularly on issues relating to sewage discharges, as I will explain. I hope she will see that I am putting this subject under the microscope in various ways.

We have been given a lot of information about the damaging impacts of uncontrolled sewage discharges into local rivers and streams. River health and the impact of sewer overflows is an absolute priority for me as the Environment Minister, and I am absolutely determined to take action on it. In my view, it has been overlooked for far too long, and it needs to rise right up the agenda. The debate gives me a great opportunity to talk about some of the related issues.

It is clear from what the hon. Member says that this issue is really important to local people, too—not just Surfers Against Sewage, which has gathered some really valuable data, including about the coast of the west country, where I come from. It has been working on this problem for years and should be commended for its work.

I will first describe some of the challenges that we face in resolving the problem of excessive sewage discharges. Without adequate treatment, wastewater discharges into our rivers can have serious impacts on the natural environment and can cause long-lasting damage to the ecosystem. There is even a potential risk to human health—the hon. Member mentioned the water-borne bacteria and viruses—so effective treatment of wastewater at wastewater treatment works is vital.

Before wastewater reaches the treatment works, there are storm overflows within the sewerage system, which the hon. Member mentioned. Storm overflows were a

design feature of Victorian sewers—they date back a very long way. They are still being used, and they remain an integral part of our infrastructure today. Many of our sewer systems are combined systems, wherein sewage is combined with rainwater, and following heavy and prolonged rain the capacity of those systems can be exceeded. When that happens, the storm overflows act as a relief valve to discharge excessive sewage, combined with rainwater, into our rivers and the sea. The idea is to protect properties from flooding and prevent the unpleasant backing up of sewage in the system into our streets and homes during heavy storms. Reliance is increasing on the storm overflows, however, largely due to escalating population growth and the consequent urban development, together with more frequent storms due to climate change and more frequent sudden weather events. All that is putting more pressure on our sewerage system and increasing the use of storm overflows.

Eliminating the harm from overflows will be challenging. It would involve disruption and high costs, which would impact on customers' bills, but recognising the scale of the challenge is the first step towards addressing it. That is what the hon. Member has highlighted today, and that is what I am working on. We are fully committed to bringing at least three quarters of our waters closer to their natural state as soon as is practicable. That is why over £30 billion has been invested by the water industry since 1990 to protect the environment, covering improvements in sewage treatment and sewage overflows. As a result, we have seen improvements in our water quality over the years, as the hon. Member recognises. I am pleased to say that we have already achieved a 67% reduction in the amount of phosphorus in our rivers, and a 79% reduction in the amount of ammonia discharge from sewage treatment works since 1995.

Around 98% of our urban areas are now in compliance with the waste water treatment regulations' standards, and in 2019, around 98% of our bathing waters met at least the minimum standard of the bathing water directive. Of those, 71% were classified as excellent, which is the highest water quality standard. Ofwat has also allocated £4.6 billion to water companies for the 2020-25 period to improve the water environment, and water companies plan to spend this money. Already, many have jointly committed £1.1 billion specifically to tackle storm overflows. That means that in every single water company region in England, investment is being made to address the problem we are discussing.

We are also making progress on understanding the scale of the problem. Water companies have installed event duration monitoring technology on the majority of storm overflows to improve our understanding of when storm overflows discharge sewage, and to trigger investigations and improvements when overflows operate too frequently. Increasingly, as the hon. Lady said, members of the public want to know more about their local environment and the pressures on it. We need to do more to make this information on storm overflows available to people in a consistent and user-friendly way. Indeed, I have received a great amount of correspondence regarding issues with storm overflows from people all around the country and MPs on every side of the House. However, we need the right data on that: water companies are already collecting lots of information and making it available, but I would like to see more progress in this area.

[*Rebecca Pow*]

I have outlined a lot of the positives, but despite the improvements that have been put in place, I know that if we do not take further action reliance on storm overflows will increase, as will the number of sewage discharges from storm overflows across the country. We need to plan carefully, while also making sure that every step provides good value for money and leads to better outcomes—outcomes that mean more people enjoying our lakes and rivers, the sea, and the beautiful coast that the hon. Lady described. That is why, through the Government’s Environment Bill, I am placing a statutory obligation on sewerage companies to make drainage and sewerage management plans. A key objective of these plans is to ensure better management of sewage discharges into our waterways. Interestingly, water companies have had to have plans for their water—what comes out of taps—but not for sewage. Now, they will have to, and I think that is going to be really important in tackling this issue.

I recognise there is a strong desire to make even wider and faster progress. As such, last August, I set up the taskforce on storm overflows, consisting of Government regulators, water companies and environmental NGOs, in an attempt to bring together all the key stakeholders—the people who are affected by this issue and can influence this space. Our taskforce is developing clear proposals for achieving a transformation in sewage treatment and management for the benefit of us all. It will explore what actions could be taken, building on the findings of a research project, and will report back on what actions it believes ought to be taken. That will add a great deal more detail to what we want to do. I have also recently met with the CEOs of the water companies, basically to rattle their cage: to say we need more, and serious, action on tackling water quality, and that they must reduce the use of these overflows in extreme weather. In addition to that, the Environment Bill sets a legally binding duty on us to set targets, so we will be setting targets to do with water quality.

The hon. Lady touched on the private Member’s Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for—

Liz Twist: Ludlow.

Rebecca Pow: I was going to say Ledbury—almost the right part of the world. I have had an awful lot of discussions with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne) about that Bill. Obviously, dates are changing now for Friday sittings and private Members’ Bills, but I and my officials are continuing to discuss it with him. Of course, he raises some very good issues.

On wet wipes, and the “Bin the wipe” message, the hon. Member for Blaydon raises a great subject. I am fully supportive of her. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been working with the water industry and the wet wipe industry to improve labelling and consumer information, and even to come up with a “fine to flush” standard, so that if a manufacturer

comes up with a wet wipe, to meet the standard of being okay to flush it has to be biodegradable and the manufacturer must prove that it does not do any damage to the environment. I fully support her on that, because we can do something about it.

The Environment Agency has a framework for all its monitoring. The hon. Lady is somewhat critical of the EA, but it has a legal framework for enforcing environmental legislation and working with the Drinking Water Inspectorate. Obviously, I will continue to hold their feet to the fire as the Minister, because we rely on their reporting back.

Liz Twist: I wish to be clear that I am not trying to be critical of the Environment Agency. I have a lot of dealings with it in my constituency and have found it very helpful and keen, but it needs funding to be able to do what it does.

Rebecca Pow: Yes, of course it does, and the EA is funded. There is a framework through which it operates, but of course if we can stop the storm overflows being used so much and we can work with the farming community to reduce the pollutants that they release into the water space, all of those things will help to reduce overall pollution.

I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for introducing this debate on sewage discharges and the impact on water quality. I hope that I have conveyed to her that it is a subject that I am taking extremely seriously and working on. Measures are being put in place. I urge her to keep up her work, too, because the more of us who work on it the more success we will have.

Liz Twist: Before the Minister concludes, will she comment on the issue of funding and maintaining environmental standards?

Rebecca Pow: Of course environmental standards are crucial, as is the monitoring that goes into informing us about what is happening in the water space. We have left Europe now, as she knows, but that does not mean that we will in any way reduce our environmental standards—indeed, I believe that we can strengthen them. We can have much more bespoke systems for the whole environmental space.

I hope that the Government have demonstrated, even in the past couple of months, how much we are putting the environment at the top of the agenda. Even in this very difficult time for us all, we have committed to protecting 30% of our land space and 30% of our waters. A raft of measures and our green recovery challenge fund demonstrate that the Government are putting the environment and all that that encompasses right at the top of the agenda. I thank the hon. Lady again for raising the subject.

Question put and agreed to.

11.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Online Anonymity

[ESTHER McVEY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered online anonymity.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McVey. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), who originally intended to lead this debate. I am pleased to step in this afternoon but saddened that we will not hear from him on this important subject.

We need to debate if and how Government could and should tackle anonymity online. We must do so, as the public are already living through the hate and misinformation in debate on a daily basis. If we do not tackle anonymity, the horror, the suicides, the bullying, racism and misogyny as well as people being put off jobs and democracy being undermined will continue unchecked. In 2021, the public expects proper leadership on tech.

An Ofcom report last year said that the average adult spends 4.2 hours a day online, with children spending even more time on their screens. Since the covid lockdown required us to work, play and learn online, I expect that the average daily screen time has shot up even more across all demographics. Yet, bizarrely, using tech more is not increasing confidence. More than three quarters of UK adults express a concern about going online, and fewer parents feel the benefits of being online outweigh the risks for their children, with the proportion falling from 65% in 2015 to 55% in 2019.

Research shows that 47% of children and teens say they saw content that they wish they had not seen during the first lockdown. Tech companies know that but have failed to do enough to protect people. What is the impact of the internet being the wild west at home? When children want a social media account, it is trolls, hate, abuse, bullying and exposure to criminality that keep parents up at night, not their kids' ability to express themselves freely. When smart individuals consider going into public office, journalism or for a promotion that will be media facing, they will hesitate and perhaps not apply, as they have seen somebody's appearance, voice, height and intelligence eviscerated on Twitter.

During the pandemic, families must work out whether what they are reading is credible or from covid deniers and anti-vaxxers, and we constantly have to undo the damage that scammers cause. Governments around the world are dealing with the impact of online actors who are attempting to subvert the democratic processes. Anonymity is, of course, not the sole cause of all these problems and, in some important circumstances, it enables people to speak freely to protect themselves or the public. Freedom of expression is integral to our society. However, if people are asked whether anonymity is a big problem online, the answer will be yes. The Minister might say that anonymous nasties will be dealt with by the coming online harms legislation. The Government will legislate to require social media platforms to take more effective actions against abuse, whether that is anonymous or not. That is quite right and there is much to praise in the Government's White Paper. The focus

on protecting children and empowering adults to stay safe online is incredibly important. The ministerial online harms work, though overdue, is to be commended.

I do not believe the proposed Bill goes far enough on a range of issues. The White Paper barely addressed the issue of anonymity, despite accepting in the document that anonymous abuse is on the rise. I was also surprised to note that the Government's consultation did not specifically ask about anonymous abuse. That was a missed opportunity. Most men and women on the Clapham omnibus would expect Government to address anonymity fully when considering online harms. That said, respondents to the consultation told the Government what they thought anyway. The paper says,

"Respondents put forward arguments both for and against preserving online anonymity, particularly in regard to protecting the identity of those individuals who flag harmful content."

It would be useful to know more about respondents' comments about anonymity to this and other Government consultations. We should consult properly on this subject.

The new legislative framework for tech companies will create a duty of care to their users. The legislation will require companies to prevent the proliferation of illegal content and activity online, and ensure that children who use their services are not exposed to harmful content. As it stands, the tech companies do not know who millions of their users are, so they do not know who their harmful operators are, either. By failing to deal with anonymity properly, any regulator or police force, or even the tech companies themselves, will still need to take extensive steps to uncover the person behind the account first, before they can tackle the issue or protect a user.

The Law Commission acknowledged that anonymity often facilitates and encourages abusive behaviours. It said that combined with an online disinhibition effect, abusive behaviours, such as pile-on harassment, are much easier to engage in on a practical level. The Online Harms White Paper focuses on regulation of platforms and the Law Commission's work addresses the criminal law provisions that apply for individuals. It is imperative, in my view, that the Law Commission's report and proposals are fully debated prior to the online harms Bill passing through Parliament. They should go hand in hand.

Standing in Parliament, I must mention that online abuse is putting people off going into public service and speaking up generally. One reason I became interested in this subject was the awful abuse I received for daring to have a baby and be an MP. Attacking somebody for being a mum or suggesting that a mum cannot do this job is misogynistic and, quite frankly, ridiculous, but I would be lying if I said that I did not find some of the comments stressful and upsetting, particularly given I had just had a baby.

Is there a greater impediment to freedom of expression than a woman being called a whore online or being told that she will be raped for expressing a view? It happens. It happens frequently and the authors are often anonymous. Fantastic groups like 50:50 Parliament, the Centenary Action Group, More United and Compassion in Politics are tackling this head on to avoid men and women being put off running for office. One of the six online harm asks from Compassion in Politics is to significantly reduce the prevalence and influence of anonymous accounts online.

[*Siobhan Baillie*]

It is also worth looking at cases where anonymity is not abusive, just bizarre or mean. These people often fly just on the right side of not committing a crime, so it cannot be touched, but they are no less stressful, damaging or awful to deal with. For example, last week I posted a picture of my nephew Rhys on social media. Some hon. Members may have seen it. I did this with my sister's permission, I add, because she is stronger than I am. Rhys has Down's syndrome and is clinically vulnerable. I wanted to show the happy face of a young man who had just had his first vaccination in Berkshire—not in my patch. I wanted to do this partly to praise the NHS and Government teams, which are doing such an awesome job of rolling out the vaccine, and to show that as the vaccine programme moves forward, it is not just elderly people who are receiving protection.

An anonymised account—interestingly, called “The truth”—immediately called foul. Within a few tweets, I had been accused of pulling rank and helping my family to jump the queue. They said that there is no lowness that Tories will go to. “The truth”—he, she or bot—copied in LBC journalists, a barrister, Piers Morgan, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). Was that to bring me down? I do not know. It was bizarre.

I personally feel sorry for “The truth”—the account, not the truth itself—and I did not personally feel stressed by that. However, others may not feel the same. Anyone, in my view, who can look at the smiling face of a young disabled person and immediately feel negative, angry or want to make political points is a very sad individual, but I will never know what damage that account has done by attempting to discredit the vaccination system and an elected Member of Parliament.

Millions of anonymous accounts spend all day sending messages that are not abusive, but also not true, in full knowledge that other mad people will join in with them. This can be debilitating for people to deal with. It causes a lot of stress. We know that such behaviour would not be acceptable offline and the people behind anonymous accounts would rarely say these things to our faces in person; it is also not okay online.

In conclusion, I think we agree that decisive action needs to be taken against racism, antisemitism, misogyny and other forms of hate crime. What is illegal offline should be illegal online. On anonymous accounts, I am not convinced that we must put up with the downsides because of the advantages. The application of anonymity in the context of whistleblowing, to an investigative journalist or to an authority has little in common with anonymity that deliberately destabilises, attacks people and whips up emotions on social media.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister, but I am not convinced at this stage that the Government have done enough to investigate this matter. I do not feel that they have done enough to understand the public's views, to pressurise tech companies to take action or to give users all the choices to have anonymity-free social media experiences, if that is what they want. Some people love to use anonymous accounts and some people love to follow them. They should probably be allowed to do that, but let us give people the choice. As I said at the start, if we do not tackle anonymity, the horror, the

suicides, the bullying, the racism, the misogyny and people being put off jobs will continue unchecked. We have the tech to do it and it can be done, so let us do it.

2.40 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms McVey.

I thank the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) for securing the debate and his excellent stand-in, the hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie), for a compelling and comprehensive introduction to why we are debating this subject today and why we need to take more action. As she said, we now live in a world where online interaction plays an ever more important role in our lives. It seems likely that when we get some normality back, online communication will still play a huge role, particularly in the world of politics.

I confess that I use Twitter. If I were not a politician, I probably would not, but it is a useful way to get a message across to a wide audience, as quickly as possible. I start from the basis that anything that helps us to communicate with the world has to be a good thing, but that has its downsides. As we have heard, it is a cesspit of abuse, hate and harassment that would not be acceptable in any other walk of life. As the hon. Member for Stroud said, that has real-life consequences. The appalling statistic that she read out, about 47% of teenagers having seen something they wish they had not seen during the first lockdown, is concerning and something that we should be looking to stamp out. She described it as the wild west; that is a thought that has crossed my mind a few times, because it seems that, like the wild west, there are no rules, no norms and no standards. That is surely not what we want to see in what should be a positive thing for the whole world.

I get a bit of abuse directed at me, like every Member, I suspect. It is nowhere near the appalling level that some Members get. As the hon. Member for Stroud said, most of the Members who get the worst abuse are women, because these trolls are often misogynist and prejudiced. They use their anonymity to project their hate on to those people. I do not mind a bit of robust debate; that is what democracy needs, but, as we saw over the pond last week, there is a line that can have serious consequences when crossed.

In my mind, there is a correlation between some of the most extreme abuse online and the anonymity of its authors. They say things they would not dream of saying to somebody's face, and they do it behind a cloak of anonymity because they are cowards. They are inadequate people. I imagine that if the people who received the abuse read it back to them, they would feel ashamed of what they had said. They say things that they would not dream of saying to a person's face because they have the security of a keyboard and a monitor in front of them, which seems to mean to them that there is no limit to what they can say.

Because everything online is there for us all to see, it has an impact—on occasion, a devastating one, as we have heard. It is the modern equivalent of taking out a full-page advert in a newspaper. It is my view that when people are given platforms, the providers of those platforms have a responsibility to ensure that they are not abused.

I will give an example of someone who tends to post abusive posts to me most days, usually in reply to a tweet I have sent. I am not going to give them the

oxygen of publicity that they obviously desperately crave by repeating what they say, but when I see those tweets they are often lies, usually highly defamatory ones. I click on the report button on Twitter, so that they are aware of my objections. Regrettably, I end up having to report that person's tweets most days. Do I ever get any kind of response from Twitter? No, I do not. I do not know whether hon. Members have ever tried to speak to someone at Twitter or even find an email address, but it seems that it specialises in not making itself approachable. For a communications company, it is pretty awful at communicating with people who want to talk to it.

That is the point: it seems that Twitter is indifferent to the problems that its platform creates. Yes, on a few high-profile occasions it acts, but the majority of the time the most heinous lies, the most disgusting abuse and the worst forms of harassment carry on unchecked because there are no consequences for it as an organisation. If it were a newspaper, it would be sued continually and would have gone bankrupt a long time ago, but because our laws are yet to catch up with the technology, it continues to be a vehicle for lies and abuse. I agree with the hon. Member for Stroud: there needs to be much stronger regulation. The amount of fake news that has been spread during the coronavirus outbreak should be the prompt for us no longer to delay introducing the legislation we need to create some kind of accountability for the consequences of the words transmitted by these platforms.

Finally, I just want to say something about how we conduct ourselves, because we have a role in this. We must take a lead and be responsible. I have to say that the way debates are conducted in this place is always respectful and courteous. Of course, people occasionally lose their cool, but there is always an apology afterwards. That should be the standard that we want to see outside this place—not just for ourselves but for everyone involved in politics. When we see those standards slip, we should not hesitate to call it out.

2.46 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship for the first time, Ms McVey. I look forward to doing so on many further occasions. I thank the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) for securing this exceptionally important debate. I also thank the hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) for her opening remarks, which were more than those of a stand-in. They set out the concerns and the personal experience really well and illustrated why this is such an exceptionally important topic to debate. I am sure that many more Members would be here had it not been for the confusion about whether this debate would be taking place. I know that this is an issue of personal, professional and constituency concern to many Members on both sides of the House; it is not a party-political issue.

I want to start by citing the right hon. Member for East Hampshire, who is aware of the challenge of online anonymity for bullying and negative self-perception among young people. He has spoken often about that, and he noted that in 2018 the OECD found that English schools have the highest reported rates of cyber-bullying out of 48 countries. As we debate online anonymity

today, we have to keep in mind the deeply troubling human impact that anonymous presence online can have, not least on our young people.

The Government ought to know about the challenge of online anonymity, because their own Commission for Countering Extremism published academic work in 2019 that noted:

“Increased anonymity is associated with increased extremist ...language”

on Twitter and YouTube. Tackling abuse and extremism online must mean tackling the worst parts of anonymity online.

We do not have to rely on academic work or the OECD to know the pain and harm that online anonymity can cause. The hon. Member for Stroud set out some of her experiences, and I would just like to say how sorry I was to hear of them. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) set out some of his experiences with Twitter, and it is highly regrettable—it is not the first time I have heard it—that Twitter does not take complaints from Members of Parliament or members of the public seriously enough.

Just last month, we heard the strong testimony of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), who highlighted over 90,000 posts aimed at her. Many were antisemitic, misogynistic and ageist, and many were posted by people hidden behind anonymous screens. We know from several colleagues, from the valuable testimony of groups such as the Antisemitism Policy Trust, and from painful personal experience that online anonymity too often accompanies online abuse. Like almost all Members of Parliament, I have experienced abuse online, particularly when I dare to say something that some people might consider to be controversial. I have never been able to find out who was behind the most violent instances of such abuse.

As the Government note, there can be trade-offs in regulating online anonymity. Anonymity can be a shield for brave whistleblowers, for victims finding online refuge, or for children and minorities finding courageous self-expression. We must not forget that the internet and social media applications have many positive consequences for people who can use them. They are free and widely available, and they allow communication across generations, geography, countries and all kinds of barriers. Simply banning online anonymity is unlikely to be workable or desirable. We have to be sensitive to the trade-offs here. Protecting privacy is as much a priority in those cases as protecting against harm is in abuse cases.

However, I would say to the Minister that inaction is the worst trade-off of them all. The Secretary of State said:

“It is a challenging area, this point about anonymity,”

and that the Government will do nothing on it in the proposed online safety Bill,

“But of course we will continue to keep it under review.”—[*Official Report*, 15 December 2020; Vol. 686, c. 157.]

The Government are evading tough trade-offs altogether. That inaction means turning a blind eye to misinformation online. It means a failure to look at victims of abuse online—young people, minority communities and our fellow Members of Parliament—and a failure to assure them that we will do better by them. It is a failure to stand by the victims in these horrendous examples.

[Chi Onwurah]

It does not have to be this way. Protecting whistleblowers does not need to come at the cost of protecting people who perpetrate abuse. We could do things differently. Indeed, there are already legal provisions that seek to balance anonymity and online responsibility. Norwich Pharmacal orders, or NPOs, can help obtain the identity of a party in court cases where there is alleged wrongdoing. The regulations in the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 give public authorities the ability to access communications data for potential criminal investigations. As we know, however, the sheer scale of online abuse and extremism means that there is more that we could and should do.

This is not a new issue. As I may have said in the past, my background before coming into Parliament was working in technology, particularly on the networks that now form the internet, for 20 years. The rights and wrongs of anonymity on the internet is a question that is as old as the internet itself, which we should remember is now decades old—it is no longer a rebellious teenager.

Three years ago, I attended a conference held by Ditchley on our rights and responsibilities on the internet, and the right to identity was a particular issue. One of the things that I want to emphasise to the Minister is that, as well as considering the right to anonymity on the internet, we must also consider the right to identity. For example, people should be able to prove who they are when they need to. Companies, services and Governments have a right to ask for identity in certain circumstances, as we do in the physical world. Anonymity should not be treated as a zero-sum concept, but should be qualified by the question, “Anonymous to whom and for how long?”

In real life, we can walk through a crowd without the people around us knowing who we are, but we accept that we are not permanently anonymous. If, for example, a police officer has a reason to review CCTV footage of the area, or we go into a bar and look young enough that we are asked about our age, we may be asked to prove our identity. We would not expect to be able to take out a loan or mortgage without proving our identity. Different degrees of anonymity apply to different situations in the real world. Why should we not reveal on the internet as much of our identity as is appropriate to the situation?

In some ways, as well as a question of principle, this is a question of design, on the way in which permissions and information are required and set out for applications on the internet. It is up to the Government to support a debate about how a spectrum of identity and anonymity should be implemented. A key aim should be to increase the friction that cyber-criminals face when pursuing crime. I do not think anyone is arguing that putting in place identity requirements and appropriate measures to support identification will end cyber-crime or cyber-abuse, but it would increase the friction associated with the crime, and that would help to reduce it.

We should consider a number of areas to address that, some of which have already been raised by the hon. Member for Stroud and my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. We should consider a requirement for companies to know their customers' identities. Contrary to the Government's position, requiring users to selectively share their identities with online platforms does not mean that users share their

identities with the world at large. Platforms can still protect users' anonymity on the public platform while having direct access to their identities in the event of harmful behaviour.

Justin Madders: We know that the business model of a lot of online tech giants is based on sharing and utilising user information commercially. Does that not show that there must be a way of getting enough information on individuals? The information does not need to be circulated, but that shows that it can be found.

Chi Onwurah: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and one that I was just about to make by citing the “know your customer” verification requirements in financial institutions, which are part of efforts to prevent money laundering, for example.

Financial institutions, although they have improved immensely in technology over the past few years, are nowhere near as knowledgeable as the great tech giants such as Facebook, Twitter and Google in scooping up and managing data, although they tell us that they manage the data in privacy-conscious ways. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston said, their business models are driven by access to data. There are real concerns about the consolidation and monopoly control of data, which are not within the remit of this debate, but, as he suggests, the idea that these organisations cannot obtain and protect effectively the identity of their users is clearly ridiculous.

Such checks would not even require platform companies to hold user identity data themselves. Instead, as in financial services, secure, expert identity verification services could allow users to share only aspects of their identity—the minimum required to access online platforms. Again, anonymity would be guaranteed relative to other users. The fact that my bank did a “know your customer” check would not mean that my bank data was suddenly accessible to other customers. I think we accept that principle. At the same time, identity would be available to relevant law enforcement authorities in the event of suspected wrongdoing. The very act of requiring a “know your customer” check would also deter malicious agents from using the cloak of anonymity and would therefore increase the friction in the system.

As a complement to those ideas, we could require platform companies to put up deterrents against abuse and harm, ensuring that customers know that their identity could be shared with law enforcement agencies in the event of wrongdoing. I know that the Minister's online safety legislation, which is in development, will put a duty of care on the large platforms. Perhaps she will tell us why she does not feel a more proactive duty to prevent and deter harm and abuse would not be appropriate, as it would require platforms to know their customers.

It is important to recognise that people are always customers. Even if those who use Twitter and Facebook are not paying for the service, they are still customers and are effectively paying in an exchange of data, so I feel that the model of “know your customer” is particularly appropriate. We could also consider imposing appropriate forms of liability on companies in the event that they are unable to provide identity information where courts and law enforcement require it.

None of those policies would obstruct the privacy of whistleblowers, children expressing themselves or victims finding solace and solidarity online. None of them would require companies to identify customers on their platforms to other customers. Some of them would not even require companies to have the identity data themselves, allowing the possibility of secure identity solutions held outside of these companies. Some of them are likely to be practices that already happen, but voluntarily and not systematically.

The point is not to pursue one specific policy. The point is for the Government to have a consultation and a debate that sets out policies that achieve those objectives, with a robust set of sophisticated digital identity options that can be statutorily enforced. Inaction, which is the Government's current default of delaying action in this area, is a choice that evades trade-offs, avoids actions and lets victims down, so I ask the Minister to use this moment to tackle online anonymity head-on. We must grasp this opportunity, and to do so we must answer three questions.

First, what is the right identity verification required to place on online platforms with user-generated content? Can we ensure that those cover what might be needed for effective action against illegal and, in some instances, harmful behaviour? How can those requirements on platform companies have impact, with the right mix of incentives and sanctions for companies?

Secondly, how can we ensure that those online platforms are best co-ordinated with law enforcement authorities, where needed? Should Ofcom's oversight of platforms' duty-of-care performance cover how effectively companies work with law enforcement authorities? I understand, for example, that Twitter charges law enforcement officials to provide information on the identity of its users. Will the Minister verify that?

Thirdly, what confidence do we have in the jurisdictional coverage of existing and potential identity verification requirements? Do those apply to the range of internationally headquartered and popular platforms, or are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter able to evade coverage as a result of country-of-origin principles?

I hope that the Minister will answer those questions, as the right answers could materially improve our public sphere and address the examples of online harm and abuse that have been raised in this debate. Platforms would be able to verify users easily, law enforcement authorities could pursue justice appropriately, those hiding online abuse behind anonymity would be deterred and, most of all, users would navigate online platforms with far greater assurance of no abuse or extremism.

With that final point, I will close, because the pandemic has demonstrated that our lives are lived online to an extent never before seen. Even when we return to social contact—we all hope soon—as opposed to social distance, the internet, the web and social media platforms will continue to play a greater part in our lives. The hon. Member for Stroud set out the enormous increase in online activity that we have seen as a consequence of the pandemic. I want my constituents to be able to have trust and confidence online, and in those they meet and engage with online. I want them to feel secure in their online and digital lives, because without that they will be handicapped and prevented from engaging as full citizens in what is increasingly a digital world. I ask the Minister to ensure that that digital world is as safe for everyone as the real world is.

3.8 pm

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage):

It is a great pleasure, Ms McVey, to serve under your stewardship for the first time—I hope the first of many. I wish to put on the record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) for securing the debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) for taking the baton so brilliantly and moving the debate forward.

Anonymous abuse online is such an important issue, and one that the Government and I take incredibly seriously. I feel that the Government's work on online harms is more important now than ever, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud articulated, the online world, the digital world, has been very much the solution to so many of our problems since the outbreak of the pandemic. It has enabled us to learn online, to work online, to socialise online and to be entertained online, but it has also been the cause of a whole range of problems. That is what we need to seek to protect people against through our online harms work.

I also put on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud for standing up to some of the dreadful abuse that she has received online—for committing the awful crime of becoming a mother. It just goes to show the depths to which people will stoop to undermine our democratic way of life. In fact to operate much more democratically and better represent the people of this country we should of course have representatives among everyone, across society, including mums. The fact that she should be attacked for that is outrageous and I thank her for sharing her experiences with us so we can understand the depths to which some people will stoop, to prepare their own particular barbs. I also loved the post that she shared about her nephew, Rhys, a very joyful photograph of somebody who had just had a vaccination. Please do not ever let these dreadful people stop her making such posts, because I think they give heart and encouragement, and sustain others through an incredibly difficult period of time.

The Government recognise that there are users who hide behind this veil of anonymity to abuse others online. A minority of internet users rely on anonymity to spout hatred to, at the moment, spread anti-vax content—I have just come from a meeting about that—and to encourage dreadful things: to encourage others to self-harm or take their life. There are people up and down this country—I have spoken to the parents of young people—who have been put through the most extreme misery and have even taken their lives as a result of that, and I know that Members of Parliament are not immune in any way from such abuse from anonymous individuals. In fact, it happens across a range of different parts of society.

As, I think, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) said, in the first half of 2020, the Community Security Trust recorded an increase in online antisemitic abuse—the highest ever recorded. Much of that abuse was carried out anonymously. That behaviour is absolutely unacceptable and we are clear in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and right across Government, that being anonymous online does not give anyone the right to abuse others. That is why we are taking steps through the online harms regulatory framework, but also through other aspects of Government work, to ensure that online abuse, whether anonymous or not, is addressed.

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

Our starting point, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) pointed out, is that companies must take action against harmful anonymous abuse online, but at the same time it must be recognised that anonymity is important for many vulnerable individuals who want to protect their identity, such as, as has been said, a victim of domestic abuse who wants to seek support anonymously, a young person or child who is questioning their sexuality and does not want their parents to know, a whistleblower from a range of potential backgrounds, or a journalist from a country where their life could be in danger for sharing their words. To correct the hon. Lady, the Government are not evading those sorts of trade-offs. We want to confront them head on, and we hope that the measure in question will be a good starting point, to enable us to begin doing it.

A range of important issues have been raised today and I want to speak further to some of them, to outline how the Government are addressing them. If I do not reach all the answers, because I do not necessarily have all the facts and figures in front of me, I will write to the Members I miss out.

In December, we published the full Government response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, setting out the new expectations on companies to keep their users safe online. The new framework will give digital businesses robust rules of the road that they can follow, so that we can seize the brilliance of modern technology that I have talked about, to improve our lives without fear, threat, discomfort or misery. Social media websites, apps and other services that host user-generated content or things that allow people to talk to one another online will need to remove and limit the spread of illegal content such as child sexual abuse, terrorist material and suicide content. All companies will need to tackle illegal anonymous abuse on their services and all companies will also need to assess the likelihood that children will access their services. If they do, the companies will need additional protections for them. Companies that provide services with the largest audiences or with the highest-risk features will have a legal responsibility to take action in respect of content or activity that is legal, but harmful to adults. This is because certain functionalities, such as the ability to share content widely or to contact users anonymously, are much more likely to give rise to harm, and the regulator, Ofcom, will set out in codes of practice how companies can fulfil this duty of care. This will include what measures are likely to be appropriate in the context of private communications. This could include steps towards making services safer by design, and we know that the technology in this area is improving all the time: it is becoming much easier to get people to prove who they are, verify their age, and do things like that. We are really keen on making sure we can use this technology to limit the ability of anonymous adults to contact children, for example, and for a range of other purposes as well.

We are working at pace to move forward with this online harms work. DCMS and the Home Office are working together to prepare this legislation, and it will be ready this year. It is absolutely vital that we get it right, for all the reasons that have been articulated by the small—but beautifully formed—number of people in this room today.

Chi Onwurah: Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinenage: I will get to the end of my sentence, then I will absolutely give way. We want all parliamentarians to feed into this significant and important piece of work, so this is a starting point. We will continue to work with Members of both Houses to listen to their concerns as we move forward, and as hon. Members will be aware, the Secretary of State is minded to undertake legislative scrutiny on this. We want that to start quite shortly.

Chi Onwurah: I did not mean to interrupt the Minister in full flow; indeed, I am grateful for the way in which she is responding to the many issues that have been raised. There was an exchange today about whether or not exceptions to the online harms legislation would be enabled through trade deals with the US, for example, and there seemed to be some confusion over that. I wondered whether the Minister would like to take the opportunity to clarify that point.

Caroline Dinenage: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me the opportunity to do so. We absolutely stand by our commitment on online harms, and are completely dedicated to it, so nothing in any trade deal—particularly the US trade deal, given that so many of these big social media companies originate there—will impact that. We will continue to promote appropriate protections for consumers online and ensure that internet users, particularly children, are safeguarded from harms. We are keen to maintain very high standards of protection for personal data, including when it is transferred across borders, and those data protection standards would never be lowered as a result of any deal with the US. I hope that that reassures the hon. Lady about our position, and I am grateful that she has given me the opportunity to put that on record.

The other thing I want to put on record is that we are very passionate about our belief, and our willingness to put out there, that companies should not wait for legislation to be in place before they start taking action to tackle online harms. I have said many times that this legislation is coming down the track, and we are not the only country in the world that is bringing forward such legislation. A vast range of measures are already available for platforms to use that could keep their users much safer online, if they want to. To help them with that, alongside the full Government response, we have published interim codes of practice on things such as preventing terrorists' use of the internet and child sexual exploitation and abuse. Those codes of practice are voluntary, but are designed to bridge the gap until the regulator is operational, fully up and running, and able to produce its own statutory codes. My strong message to online providers is that they should start getting their house in order now, rather than wait for the legislation to bring that about.

Of course, being anonymous online does not give anybody the right to abuse others. The police have a range of legal powers to identify individuals who attempt to use anonymity to escape sanctions for online abuse where the activity is illegal; I have not heard before that Twitter charges for supporting that work, but I will certainly look into it. The Investigatory Powers Act allows police to acquire communications data such as an email address and the location of the device from

which the illegal anonymous abuse was sent, and they can use that data as evidence in court. In fact, in 2017-18, the majority of communications data requests from public authorities were for subscriber information. Subscriber information requests seek to identify the user of a telephone, an email address or a social media account, for example. In 96% of cases, the applicant identified the subject of the request as the suspect in the investigation.

The Government are undertaking a review with law enforcement to ensure that the current powers that it has are sufficient to tackle illegal anonymous abuse online. Because the online world is so fast-moving, we want to ensure that our law enforcement agencies are fully equipped to be able to do that. The outcome of that work will inform the Government's position in relation to illegal anonymous abuse online and, of course, the online harms regulatory framework.

In addition, to ensure that the criminal law is fit for purpose to deal with online abuse, we have instructed the Law Commission to review existing legislation on abusive and harmful communications. The commission has highlighted in its consultation the fact that it acknowledges that anonymity online often facilitates and encourages abusive behaviours. It combines with—the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston pointed this out—the lack of restraint that an individual feels when they are communicating online, compared with communicating in person.

I have had experience of that myself. People have posted on Facebook, "I'm going to go and see that Ms Dinenage and give her a piece of my mind. I'm turning up here, at this time, on this date. I'm going to be there." That has never materialised in real life, for which I am very thankful, but you can imagine how frightening it is. People have a lot of bravado when hidden behind a screen or keyboard, and it is very difficult to know whether that bravado could tip over into real life. There is a lack of restraint online, compared with in person, and abusive behaviours such as pile-on harassment and cyber-flashing are much easier to engage in, at a practical level, via the anonymity of these platforms.

As part of the review, the Government have asked the Law Commission to examine how the criminal law will address the encouragement or assistance of self-harm as well. That is something that is incredibly distressing. As the Minister who took over this role, I have found that one of the hardest conversations that I have had to have is with young people who have been incited to self-harm or, indeed, to take their own life online.

The Law Commission has consulted on its proposed reforms, and a final report is expected early this year. We are going to consider very carefully using the online harms legislation to bring its final recommendations into law where it is appropriate to do so. We are really committed to tackling all harms online, including anonymous abuse. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central talked about sanctions. We want to ensure that Ofcom has the ability to use sanctions. They are tough—up to 10% of global turnover. We will not shy away from that—it is more than is being proposed by the equivalent European legislation, for example—because we know that anonymous abuse can have such a significant impact on victims. We have all seen a little

bit of it ourselves, but we know that there are people outside the House who are much more broadly affected than we are. Whether someone is a member of the public, a high-profile public figure or a child subject to the most awful abuse outside the school gates, where they just cannot escape it, it is really important that we have a regulatory framework that adequately addresses this issue, while also protecting the value of freedom of expression. We have always to keep that in our minds as well. It is vital that we tread that line very carefully. It is vital that we get the legislation right.

We want all parliamentarians to be able to feed into this really significant and important piece of work. As the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central said, there would have been a lot more people here today in normal circumstances. My door is always open, because I want to continue to work with Members of both Houses to listen to their concerns as we move forward.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the Minister for giving way again, and thank her again for the tone in which she is responding to issues. May I summarise the position—without putting words in the Minister's mouth—by saying that online anonymity is not currently directly addressed in the proposed legislation, but it could be if there was thought to be sufficient reason to do so? Is that a fair summary?

Caroline Dinenage: That will be addressed in a number of the broader protections. I was very taken with what the hon. Member said—I wrote down the words she used—about the importance of the right to identity, as well as the right to anonymity.

We really want to get this piece of legislation right. The other day, somebody raised with me the analogy of the invention of the motorcar. The internet is such a big invention that it is almost like that. With the advent of the motor car, we did not put in place seatbelts, airbags, the highway code or even the driving test—my grandfather did not take one—from the outset. Some of those innovations had to come down the track, but I really want to put in place as many protections for the internet from the outset as we can. I want to make this piece of legislation as robust, powerful, far-reaching and successful as possible. That is why I am not taking anything off the table. I want genuinely to put this legislation through pre-legislative scrutiny, take the comments of both Houses and ensure that, when we move forward, we do so in the best possible way. That is why we will continue to keep the area of anonymity under review as we progress with the online safety legislation.

3.26 pm

Siobhan Baillie: I will not take much time. I really appreciate all the contributions and listening to the Minister and the shadow Minister. It is quite clear from listening to even the few people here that this is a really complex area. There is no one solution or quick fix that we can make. It was also helpful to hear from the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) about the part that tech companies need to play. This cannot and should not all fall to Government. The tech companies are smart-thinking and already have the tech at their fingertips. They can act, they can respond to people and they can fix things far quicker than they already do.

[Siobhan Baillie]

The Government are clearly doing an awful lot of thinking about anonymity and how to protect people from abuse from anonymous accounts. However, I respectfully suggest to the Minister that I do not feel that that flows through in the paperwork that we have for the White Paper, or the consultation so far. This is such a big area, and such a focus of the public when we talk about online harms, that it would be helpful if, when mentioning online harms, anonymity is addressed specifically and we think through the regulations and the particular actions that the tech companies and Government can take to address it, because it is important. Thank you, Mrs McVey, for your stewardship.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered online anonymity.

3.27 pm

Sitting suspended.

War Memorials: Desecration

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of desecration of war memorials.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies.

“Every war memorial in every village, every town and every city across our country is sacred and serves to remind us of the immeasurable gratitude that we must afford to our armed forces, both past and present.”—[*Official Report*, 23 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 1215.]

Those are the words I spoke in the House of Commons on 23 June 2020, with my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) by my side, as we submitted our private Member’s Bill for a specific law to punish the desecration of war memorials.

A lack of comprehensive reporting of vandalism of this nature means that it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of incidents each year, although the War Memorials Trust does an excellent job of documenting them. My hon. Friend and I came together after images were beamed across the nation of a hooligan standing on the Cenotaph and twice attempting to set alight the Union flag on 7 June 2020.

Mr Sang has since pleaded guilty to attempted arson. For that, he received a two-year conditional discharge and a fine of £340. I am sorry to say it, but the punishment simply does not fit the crime. It is a slap in the face of our brave and gallant men and women from not just the UK but across the Commonwealth, who gave their lives in the face of tyranny. The Cenotaph is a symbol of the nation’s gratitude for the sacrifice of their tomorrows for our todays.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): When I saw the hon. Gentleman’s name down for this debate, I was keen to come along to participate and support him, and I sought his permission to do so. Does he not agree that the desecration of the Churchill memorial in Parliament Square was disgraceful? Our sincere thanks must be given to the couple who took the time to try to clean it with water and soap as a mark of respect. Does he also agree that the message must be strong not only in this place now, but in the legislation put forward, that if people vandalise, whatever their reason, they will be prosecuted? They should be prosecuted heavily and made to do community service, as well as paying any fine.

Jonathan Gullis: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman was a co-signatory—a sponsor—of the private Member’s Bill. I completely agree that what we saw happen with the Churchill statue was wrong beyond all measure. If only I could play the video of the Churchill statue filmed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) as he was standing outside. Clearly, were it not for Winston Churchill, swastikas would be flying above this very building and we would be living in a very different country. We owe Churchill a huge debt of gratitude for bringing together a nation, the Commonwealth and our allies to fight the tyranny and racism of, sadly, those who ran Nazi Germany.

The image of the Cenotaph is beamed into our homes and around the world on Remembrance Sunday, with Her Majesty the Queen, her family, our political leaders, Commonwealth representatives, heads of faith communities, and past and present armed forces personnel standing in silence to pay respect to the glorious dead. Rightly, therefore, many across our nation were sickened and angered by the actions of Mr Sang and the unduly lenient sentence that followed. That has only emboldened my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell and me to seek justice for our glorious dead.

We were shocked to learn that the law was severely lacking in this area. Although there is provision in existing legislation to hold criminals to account for damage to property, and offenders have been successfully prosecuted, relatively few are held to account for the severity of the aggravating circumstances that come with criminally damaging something as sacred to the nation as war memorials.

For damage to war memorials, my hon. Friend's and my Bill proposes exemption from the £5,000 damages threshold under the Criminal Damage Act 1971; removal of a maximum fine in favour of an unlimited fine; and establishment of a maximum custodial sentence of 10 years' imprisonment. It is important to stress that we are not calling for every offence to be met with 10 years' imprisonment; we are enabling our judiciary to use their discretion to decide whether the offence is worthy of being moved to a Crown court, without the £5,000 threshold barrier blocking its way. Let us join our friends in Australia, the United States and Canada by paying the respect that we owe to those who died in the freedom fight against tyranny.

My hon. Friend and I are very grateful to the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor, who have worked closely with us. We were delighted to see the intent in Government to create a specific law in this area in the sentencing reform Green Paper. We are therefore seeking from the Minister a cast-iron guarantee that this proposal will progress unamended into the Green Paper and any legislation, and that it will be made law as soon as possible. If we are given that assurance and see it in black and white, we will withdraw our private Member's Bill on Second Reading to enable the Government to pick up the baton, and to give them the space to pass this legislation in haste.

The price of war is immeasurably high. I saw that at first hand when a young man from Stratford-upon-Avon, Private Conrad Lewis, lost his life in Afghanistan in 2011. The pain felt by his friends and the community stays with me to this today. Those of us who value freedom of thought, speech and expression know that we can never repay the debt that we owe to these men and women. All we can do is immortalise their memory and display our gratitude for their sacrifice.

In the constituency of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, which I am honoured to serve, I witness every year the importance the community places on remembering our past and present armed forces personnel. In Kidsgrove, the Royal British Legion, on its own initiative, has set up a beautiful war memorial garden that is used all year round. Every November, thousands of members of the community line the streets and come together to lay wreaths and remember our fallen. In Smallthorne, the superb veterans breakfast club at The Green Star pub, run by Martyn Hunt and Paul Horton,

serves all veterans across Stoke-on-Trent as a way of bringing our heroes together to share their stories and lend support to one another.

In Norton Green, the local community came together when the local church, with the names of their fallen, was sold to a local developer. The residents' association took it upon itself to create a memorial on the village green. Working with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, it now has a symbol of great importance at the heart of its community. Councillor Chandra Kanneganti and I hope to do that with the residents' association of Goldenhill and Sandyford.

At Chatterley Whitfield colliery, the Chatterley Whitfield Friends, made up of former miners on the site, have created a beautiful memorial to remember those who lost their lives not only abroad but at home while bringing much-needed coal to support the war effort. In Ball Green, local councillors Dave Evans, James Smith and Carl Edwards are looking at helping to contribute funds to restore the memorial in that former mining village. Last but not least, in Butt Lane we have the Reginald Mitchell peace garden. Thanks to Councillor Kyle Robinson, the memory of Butt Lane lad Reginald Mitchell, who invented the Spitfire, which won us the battle of Britain, will never be forgotten.

I am proud to have family who served their country to protect our liberty. My great-great-uncle, Alan Gullis, who lives today, is a D-day veteran, and my grandfather, Terrence Gullis, served in the Royal Marines during the Suez crisis. I remember growing up and sitting on my grandad's knee, listening to his tales about life in our armed forces, hoping one day to serve, but sadly unable to do so due to being deaf in my right ear. I also remember the exciting trips to the D-Day Story museum in Portsmouth with my dad, Malcolm, and touring the D-day beaches across France one summer.

Damage and desecration of war memorials is not about the financial cost to repair them. It is about the harm done to a community and nation, which no monetary value can ever be put on. Memorials stand in great, solemn, eternal remembrance of the glorious dead. We cannot bring back those lives or erase the grief of families and communities. The very least we can do is ensure that memorials are adequately protected and punish those who would do them harm.

4.8 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): It is great privilege and honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis). His energy, passion and determination to see this Bill introduced is unrivalled, and it is a great privilege to serve alongside him.

At their core, war memorials serve to remind us of the sacrifices made by so many to keep this country safe. Men and women who go overseas perhaps have no idea of when or how they might return. They leave behind their families and loved ones to fight an unknown enemy. Those people do not do it for the money, the gratitude or the glory—far from it. They do it because they believe they are doing something for the greater good. It is called service. They put their lives on the line, day in, day out, as a means to a better future for the rest of us.

[James Sunderland]

Memorials in the UK abound. We have the Cenotaph, the Armed Forces Memorial at Staffordshire, the Unknown Warrior in Westminster, the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge in the highlands, and more than 100,000 memorials throughout the UK, all preserved and cared for by the War Memorials Trust. Overseas memorials are cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The UK rightly takes remembrance very seriously. We have asked so much of our armed forces, and the very least they deserve is that their memory is honoured. Those people had other options in their lives; they made a real decision to walk into their careers office, to sign up to volunteer, to embrace the national imperative and to leave behind the comforts that we enjoy every day to go to places that most of us would never dream of going to.

To reiterate, this is a free country. If people do not wish to personally pay their respects to those who did not make it home, no one is forcing them to. In fact, these men and women died so that we can be free to think and say exactly what we please. However, what is non-discretionary is the vandalising of objects erected in their memory. That is why they must be preserved and better protected in law.

This Conservative Government is determined to be a resolute defender of our culture and heritage. We believe in acknowledging heroism and protecting its memory, so it is right that we will. As for the legislation itself, as my good friend from Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke mentioned, not all actions will merit a 10-year sentence. What it does, however, is give more freedom to prosecutors so they are not shackled by limits. Removing the £5,000 barrier for damage is crucial. Previously, damage was required to be greater to warrant prosecution, but that is nonsense. Giving judges increased powers, whether in a magistrates court or a Crown court, is fundamental, allowing them to use their judgement.

I served for 26 years as a regular Army officer and deployed on multiple operational tours, so I do know a bit about the need to commemorate those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Every single war memorial, irrespective of nation, faith or location, serves as a visual reminder of the horrors of war and the appalling conditions that people face when fighting for their country. Aside from the fear, anxiety and terror experienced by so many in the service of others, each memorial carries the legacy of those who fell on the battlefield and did not come home.

These names are not just an inscription on stone, but actual human beings who lived, loved and were loved. These heroes had friends and families and were in the prime of their life when they were taken. Each memorial bears testimony to lives cut short, the anguish suffered by families, the potential that was never fulfilled, the children that were never born, and the guilt suffered by those who did come home. That is why we must ensure that memorials are sufficiently protected in law and that those who seek to damage them through wilful ignorance or stupidity are brought to justice.

One of the most profound and proudest moments of my life was when I attended the D-day 75 commemorations in Portsmouth in June 2019. It was a magnificent event. Veterans were there in their hundreds, although sadly declining in number. They were resplendent in their

uniforms—shiny brass and medals, and polished boots. The twinkle in their eyes conveyed some pretty powerful testimonies of life gone by. It was great to be among them, but two things struck me. First, every single veteran I spoke to underplayed the magnitude of their achievements. They were, to quote them, just doing their job: “I did what I was asked to do and nothing more.” That humility, for me, was very profound. Secondly, what became apparent to me—it was a really powerful moment—was the guilt that these great people have carried all their lives for the fact that they came home and others did not. That is why we must protect the memorials in law.

4.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I begin where my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) began, with a sincere thank you to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) for securing a debate on this really important subject and for his strong campaigning on it. He made an excellent speech, if I may say so. This is the second time I have had the pleasure of listening to him. I was in the main Chamber for his private Member’s Bill in June, and then, as now, he spoke with force and authenticity on behalf of his constituents.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell, who gave an excellent speech as well. In particular, he gave a powerful reminder of the abiding commitment to service that underpins the ethos of our armed forces—it underpins it now, and it underpinned it in the past, not least during the D-day landings, which he referred to.

Let me turn first to the context. As hon. Members are aware, during a variety of demonstrations last summer, protestors targeted statues, including war memorials and other commemorations of cultural significance. The Government were appalled to see the violence and vandalism at those protests because, however noble a cause a person believes they are supporting, there can be no justification for defacing statues or unlawfully damaging symbols of British history, still less desecrating memorials to those who died serving our country.

Quite apart from the hurt and pain caused, those are lawless and mob tactics. Such behaviour subverts our democracy because it corrodes the basic norms of due process that make this a free society under the law and, indeed, the kind of country that many hundreds of thousands of Britons have fought to defend.

Jim Shannon: I listened to the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) and for Bracknell (James Sunderland) and was inspired and moved by their comments. Wherever attacks on war memorials may be—in Northern Ireland, for instance, where I know the hon. Member for Bracknell served—those attacks will be raw for those back home, because the names of people they have loved will be on those memorials, and the names of family members or friends will be on them. The effect is not just what is done to the war memorial; there is also an effect on the family.

Alex Chalk: I absolutely agree. One of the great pleasures in this place is to have the opportunity to hear from hon. Members who have either served on the

frontline themselves or have personal experience of what loss means for relatives. Our debates are enhanced by those contributions.

As I was saying, this kind of behaviour corrodes our democracy, far beyond the mere monetary value of the damage caused. Memorials matter. I will make a brief personal point. As I cycle home from Parliament, I pass by the Rifle Brigade war memorial, which is parked on a busy junction in Victoria. Every time I pass, I am struck by how modest is that physical tribute to those who gave so much. Although dignified, it is unobtrusive, austere even. One could easily miss it. Yet, it honours a full 11,575 men who died in the first world war and more than 1,000 who died in the second world war—more than have died in the British armed forces in all the conflicts since 1945. The least the living can do is defend and honour such memorials. We have a duty to do so, not least for the sake of the dead, who can no longer speak up for themselves.

In his excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell referred to those who served who had loved and were loved. That is an echo of the poem by John McCrae, “In Flanders Fields”. That came to mind because he summoned the voices of the fallen in that poem. He expressed what the dead might say, if only they could speak. The last three lines are:

“If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.”

We must not break faith with those who died.

Memorials are not just limited to our war dead. The public is also rightly concerned about upholding respect for other memorials, including statues, gravestones and other matters. Such memorials can have historical significance as part of our national heritage, or other symbolic, cultural or emotional importance. When damage or desecration occurs, the law must be equipped to recognise the range and level of anguish that is caused.

As I have indicated, that anguish goes beyond mere pain to individuals or damage to property. In so many cases it can represent an attack on society. I regret to say that too many people feel able to lash out, to take the law into their own hands and to do so with relative impunity. That is why it has become clear to the Government, not least because of the excellent campaigning of my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent North and for Bracknell, that the law as it stands is inadequate, and we intend to act.

As I mentioned, on 23 June, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North introduced a private Member’s Bill, supported in this House by others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). The Desecration of War Memorials Bill seeks to create a specific offence of damage or desecration of a war memorial.

The Lord Chancellor has indicated, as indeed has the Prime Minister, that we wish to take action in this field. The Prime Minister himself made it explicit at Prime Minister’s questions on 17 June, when he said that the Government are

“looking at new ways in which we may legislate against vandalism of war memorials”.—[*Official Report*, 17 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 796.]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North indicated, the Home Secretary has made similar statements. The Lord Chancellor wrote an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 21 June, committing to ensuring that

“laws around criminal damage are fit for purpose and that the punishment for vandalising memorials fits the crime.”

He went on to state that the Government would need to legislate, and that

“now is an opportune moment to think about memorials more broadly and make sure that all acts of vandalism that cause widespread disgust can be appropriately punished by the courts.”

There are various approaches that the Government could adopt to tackle this issue. We have been considering all options to stop those who seek to attack emblems of our national sacrifice and pride, including the proposed Desecration of War Memorials Bill. We want to make sure that any vandalism or attack on property can be met with the full force of the law, so that the courts are equipped with the tools they need to do justice on the facts of the case before them, which was an excellent point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North. No one is suggesting that all cases and all examples need to be dealt with by a maximum sentence; that would be absurd. The courts will do justice, but they need to have the powers so that they can do that justice on the facts as they find them to be.

As such, although the Government fully support the intention behind my hon. Friend’s private Member’s Bill and firmly agree with the action that needs to be taken, we want to go further and protect a wider range of property. As announced in the sentencing White Paper, “A Smarter Approach to Sentencing”, which we published on 16 September 2020, we will be reviewing the law, not merely the guidance, on criminal damage to ensure that where memorials are damaged or desecrated, the courts are able to sentence appropriately at every level for this particular type of offending. As we indicated in that White Paper, we will be legislating on this matter this year—in the early part of this year, I think it is possible to say—setting out the approach that we will be taking to deal with this issue. When the private Member’s Bill on the desecration of war memorials returns to Parliament on Second Reading next month, the Government will confirm their position on the Bill in accordance with the required parliamentary process, and I am confident it will address the points my hon. Friends have so ably made.

To conclude, the Government intend to deal decisively with this issue, and I thank my hon. Friends for their shared commitment to tackling this crime. I will close by saying that those who take the law into their own hands—who vandalise our heritage, lash out at symbols they disagree with, or demean and dishonour our war dead—should be on notice. We will give the courts the power to do justice on behalf of all: the dead, the living, and those who have yet to be born.

Question put and agreed to.

4.23 pm

Sitting suspended.

Kashmir

4.30 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the political situation in Kashmir.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I will not take interventions, as this is a short debate and I want everybody to have an opportunity to say what they want and need to say.

I am sure we have all caught ourselves at some stage moaning about lockdown, but for the people of Kashmir it is not something new and, unlike here, in Kashmir lockdown is not about safety; it is about control. In our lockdown, we talk about Netflix, FaceTime and Zoom. In Kashmir, it is very different. The lockdown of 2019 shut off entire communities and their communications to the outside world. Around 7 million people have been silenced and cut off. There were families worried about loved ones. Students studying in Luton were unable to get fees paid by parents in Kashmir, as banking ceased. There are curfews to control people's lives, not a virus—a lockdown enforced by half a million soldiers.

When Narendra Modi stripped Kashmir of its autonomy and statehood in August 2019, he also cancelled Kashmiris' rights to land and jobs. Along with the loss of rights came the loss of dreams for so many. It has also laid bare the true motivation for such a removal of freedoms for the entire world to see—see, yet say nothing about, and, in most cases unfortunately, do nothing about as well.

I have attended numerous meetings with people living in Luton and internationally—those who live in Jammu and Kashmir, those who have loved ones there and people who just care about human rights. A person does not and should not have to be Kashmiri to care about their struggle for self-determination—their struggle to live safely and freely. What happens in Kashmir is felt across the world and in communities such as mine in Luton North.

The pandemic has not slowed the reports of human rights abuses. In some cases, it has exacerbated people's pain. Muslims have reported being turned away from hospitals. That is shocking at the best of times, but especially so during a global pandemic. There are spates of unexplained and uninvestigated killings. The recent killing of two young men and a 16-year-old boy, Athar Mushtaq, must be investigated. Will the Minister join the call for a transparent investigation into their deaths? Will he make that call clear to his relevant international counterparts?

As with all war, sadly, women are the silent casualties. The situation in Kashmir is no different. There are numerous reports of Kashmiri women and girls being raped. Senior officials in the Bharatiya Janata party have put on record their intentions to make Kashmiri women a part of the conflict. The Chief Minister of Haryana said:

“Some people are now saying that as Kashmir is open, brides will be brought from there. But jokes apart, if [the gender] ratio is improved, then there will be a right balance in society”.

That is appalling. I have heard from women in Kashmir who are terrified of being assaulted by the thousands of soldiers on their doorstep. Women fear for their lives and do not feel safe.

We often hear about the UK's commitment to women's rights, but will the Minister's actions match the rhetoric? What guarantees can he give that rape claims in asylum cases from Kashmiri women will be taken seriously by his colleagues at the Home Office, especially after the worrying reports from Women Against Rape that thousands of asylum-seeking women were either disbelieved out of hand or not routinely asked if they had suffered sexual violence in asylum interviews? I sincerely hope that changes.

I want to raise with the Minister an issue not often discussed regarding Kashmir, but which is incredibly important in the world we live in. What are the Government doing to tackle the use of social media sites, in particular WhatsApp, which are used to stoke the flames of division and further weaponise Islamophobia in the region? Online communication is now part of modern-day warfare. We regularly see states and leaders—not just Trump—use online propaganda as part of their arsenal. On the flip side, Kashmiris' freedom of speech online is suffocated to the point that any criticism of the Indian Government risks terrorism charges. Will the Minister commit to work internationally on online propaganda, fake news, the spread of racism and the measures taken to silence news coming from Kashmir?

The fight for Kashmiris to determine their own future is now decades-long, and that outcome looks further from reality than ever before. I wish we were here to talk about what the future of Kashmir could look like—how its people could rightly shape and be in charge of their own destiny. What would come next? However, given the current political situation in Jammu and Kashmir, it is clear that we are a long way from realising that hope.

Until the people of Kashmir have the most fundamental of all human rights—to live safely and to be free from fear—we must, and we will, continue to stand with the people of Kashmir. I say to Kashmiris, whether in Kashmir or in Luton North, you have not only my solidarity, but my enduring friendship and commitment to keep fighting until your human rights are protected, now and in the future.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): As people can see, there are eight people on the call list wishing to speak. I want to get to the Front-Bench spokespersons by as close to 5.10 pm as possible, so we will start with a limit of five minutes, which will probably have to be reduced. I call James Daly.

4.35 pm

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) on securing this important debate, and I agree with absolutely every word that she said in respect of this issue.

The voices of individual MPs in different parts of the country are so important. I have a large Kashmiri diaspora in my constituency. Throughout the general election campaign, the most important issue for that section of my population—they are the friendliest, most entrepreneurial and most positive, decent people whom I have had the pleasure to meet—was the issue of Kashmir. It came back to the issue of human rights, which is what I want to talk about today.

It will not surprise you, Mr Davies, that the first speech I wrote was far too long and wordy. It was a history lesson that we do not need to hear today. What we need to concentrate on is that this is a human rights issue. I am lucky enough to be an officer of the all-party parliamentary Kashmir group. It seems a long time ago, but we went to Kashmir in February and March of last year. I went with my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) and Labour Members. The reason we went—I hesitate to speak on behalf of my hon. Friend—is that it is not enough to say to our constituents, “Yes, I can read about this in a book.” After speaking to my constituents during the general election, I wanted to go to the frontline to ask people who are affected by the crisis and the ongoing human rights disaster what was going on. As one example, we went to a refugee camp in Kotli and met people who had suffered the most grievous injuries. We are talking about hundreds of people, not people who were in a queue provided by some political organisation. They told us that these appalling acts are happening.

The hon. Member for Luton North was absolutely right to say that the lockdown in Kashmir is not like our lockdown. It is a lockdown that attacks the fundamental rights that we all take for granted in this country. The Government have quite rightly expressed in the last few days their views on China’s treatment of the Muslim population in that country. We must take a similar stance in respect of Kashmir and put the obvious human rights abuses at the top of our agenda. Thousands of our fellow citizens are from a Kashmiri background and have family members there who are affected on a daily basis by the acts that take place.

As a lawyer, I have a long list of human rights abuses—things such as detention without trial. There are people in Kashmir who have been waiting 15 years for a trial—15 years! There is not a word from the international community in respect of that. Torture is commonplace, and young people are disappearing, yet we do not see that on television screens in the western world—we do not see it on the BBC. Quite rightly, we recently saw coverage of the issues in Hong Kong and other places. Kashmiris are people who we represent—they are our friends, and this issue affects their daily lives. We must take a stand.

All I ask from the excellent Minister—I know how committed he and the Government are to standing up to human rights abusers throughout the world—is that whatever our relationship with other countries, and whatever the political dimension to this, we cannot be deflected from the task of working with our international partners to come up with an appropriate way to protect the interests of children. I have heard appalling stories of rape and sexual violence against women—it is absolutely appalling. As an international community working with our European partners with President-elect Biden in America, we have the opportunity now to come up with an international programme through the United Nations that will give succour and hope to those poor people in Kashmir who for 70-plus years have been going through the most awful, appalling hell.

There is always a temptation, in all debates, to blame this or that person. I would like to finish by saying we can draw a line in the sand and join together on a cross-party basis. We can be united by a determination to help, with regard to anti-Muslim persecution in Kashmir. We can be united in our desire to protect human rights

everywhere but certainly in that region. The geopolitical issues there are perhaps the most severe in the world, with two nuclear powers. Therefore I welcome this debate. I know that the Government are committed to human rights, and that the Minister is. I thank all colleagues for their contributions. Let us all stand and do this together again and again.

4.40 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, on this important debate on the political situation in Kashmir. As a constitutional entity, the so-called Azad Jammu and Kashmir, which is better known to the world as Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, is not just strange but unique. It has been given the trappings of a country, with a President, Prime Minister and even a legislative assembly, but it is neither a country with its own sovereignty nor a province with its own clearly defined devolved authority from the national Government. Under section 56 of the AJK interim constitution of 1974, the Pakistan Government can dismiss any elected Government in AJK, irrespective of the support it might have in the legislative assembly.

Strangely enough for an entity that purports to be a country, the constitution bars anyone from public office and prohibits them from participating in politics unless they publicly support the principle of Jammu and Kashmir acceding to Pakistan. Imagine that: a country all of whose politicians can be politicians only if they say they do not want to be a country. It will therefore come as little surprise to colleagues when I say that all the major civil and police administrative positions in AJK are held by Pakistani civil and military officers. It may also come as no surprise to them to find that that putative country has no representation in the Parliament of Pakistan. The territory’s local representatives are excluded not just from the Pakistan Parliament but from even those Pakistani bodies that negotiate inter-provincial resource allocation and federal taxes. So much for “No taxation without representation”. It is not a country. It is not a province. It is not a state. It is a satrapy. Were I not a British MP, conscious of the fact that much of this mess is a legacy of our colonial past in the region, I might almost describe it as a prize of war; but then, of course, that is precisely what Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is.

Yesterday in this Chamber we held a debate on religious persecution. Religious minorities in Pakistan have been systematically marginalised. Pakistan, while calling itself an Islamic republic, actually had a secular constitution in 1956. It was only after the ethnic civil war in 1971, which saw the division of the country and the secession of East Pakistan to form Bangladesh, that Pakistan adopted Islam as its state religion under a new and less democratic—and much less secular—constitution. Stringent blasphemy laws mean that many religious groups face the death penalty if they are even accused of denigrating the Prophet, peace be upon him. Sadly, the infamous case of Asia Bibi is not unique, and the rights of women are of course governed by the Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance 1979 penal provisions, which prevent women from exercising their marriage choices.

The South Asia Terrorism Portal records that, of the 42 identified terrorist training camps located in Pakistan, 21 were located in Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Those camps belong to three main terrorist groups:

[Barry Gardiner]

Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Hizbul Mujahideen. One of the key areas around which the camps are located is Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. According to Human Rights Watch, the Pakistani Government repress democratic freedoms, muzzle the press and practise routine torture within Azad Jammu and Kashmir. According to the world press freedom index, prepared by Reporters Without Borders, Pakistan ranks 142nd out of the world's countries. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 2019 "Human Rights and Democracy" report noted that the human rights situation continues to worsen, and pointed out that freedom of expression and intimidation of journalists continue to be a serious problem. The report speaks of widespread intolerance, violence and discrimination, and Pakistan is one of the countries of deterioration, as they are called by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The situation moved on. Despite further conflicts in 1965, the Simla agreement was signed in 1972, when both countries committed to resolving all differences bilaterally and peacefully. That is what they should do, and it is what UK policy is and should be: to let them resolve their differences without political interference from either side.

I deplore the way in which some have always tried to import the conflicts of the subcontinent into our domestic politics. In my borough of Brent, our council leader is a fine and devout Muslim whose family is from Pakistan; our chief whip is a wonderfully authoritative Bangladeshi woman; and our Greater London Authority representative is an enormously respected Hindu.

4.46 pm

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) on securing this debate and introducing it so well. It is very noticeably a cross-party assembly here, and we will be hearing many views from all sides. Frankly, this is not a matter of left and right; it is a matter of right and wrong.

We are not against India. It is a huge country with an incredible history and limitless potential, but that does not mean that we should not hold the Indian Government to account for their abusive behaviour, especially in Kashmir. We also reject any argument in relation to Kashmir, the Punjab or the Uyghurs in China that these are internal matters and of no concern to those outside. Human rights are actually a universal matter and universal concern. That was unambiguously established 75 years ago this week, just across the road from here, when the United Nations had its first meeting of its Assembly and its Security Council.

Britain, of course, has a special place in raising this matter, not just because of our history but because of the concern of thousands of our constituents, who are desperately worried about their families in Jammu and Kashmir. It is made even worse when communications are shut down and they have to spend weeks and sometimes months with no idea what has happened to their loved ones. Obviously, that is of deep concern to them, and that is why it should be of deep concern to us.

Can we be clear? The current crisis has been deliberately instigated by the Indian authorities with their rewriting of the long-standing constitution, which has been left

by parties of different stripes in India before. That has undermined the autonomy of Kashmir. There has also been the change to property law, to try to change the facts on the ground in Kashmir, fundamentally by changing the population and therefore trying to secure a different outcome from a possible referendum.

Then, in the face of understandable opposition, there was a dramatic and brutal shutdown of communications and there were beatings of individuals, shootings—including many well attested cases of people being hit by birdshot and blinded as a consequence—arrests and disappearances, which I have to say were also an appalling feature of the crackdown in the Punjab after the assault on the Golden Temple. And many report that this is still going on.

So bad was the situation that for quite a long time Indian opposition politicians were denied the right to visit the area by the authorities. In spite of condemnation from around the world, oppression continues to this day, and we have the dangerous situation of two nuclear powers facing off and shooting against each other across the border. Clearly, not only is that a matter of concern to those in the area, but it should be of great concern to the international community as a potential threat to world peace and international order.

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge in his reply the suffering of the people of Kashmir—previous Ministers have indicated that they have raised the issues strongly with Indian Ministers—and his concern. Will he tell us what the Government intend to do to bring about peace and justice to this beautiful but troubled land, and to bring peace of mind to its people and to their families here in the United Kingdom?

Philip Davies (in the Chair): It may help to say that after the next speaker, I will have to reduce the timing to four minutes.

4.50 pm

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am grateful to be following the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar).

I am a member of the all-party parliamentary Kashmir group, and we have worked proactively to promote human rights across all parts of Kashmir. I travelled with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly) to Pakistan. We went to the line of control, and I was able to witness at first hand what my constituents have been telling me for a long time. These are truly heartbreaking stories to hear. We need to be doing all we can to support people. I will be very frank and honest: it was one of the most sobering experiences of my life, especially when we visited the refugee camp.

One of the moments that will stay with me forever was when we arrived. A man was pulling at my arm for me to take notice of him. It is difficult to talk about, but he pulled up his trouser leg and explained how, when he was tortured, his leg was cut off. He showed me that. Then I had the women and children begging me, pulling at me. My hon. Friend can confirm that too, because he saw that happening—they were desperate for my help, and they were begging me.

That should not be happening. We are in the 21st century, and we need to be doing something about it. It is awful, and it has been for years. The citizens of the region have

been living in the world's most militarised zone, with the fallout damaging the lives of the men, women and children of Kashmir with curfews, a ban on communications access, the closing of media outlets, and widespread arrest of politicians and human rights activists. We have seen similar treatment before by authoritarian states, but let us be clear that today's oppression could get worse. As an advocate of the Kashmir region, I have been pleased by the human rights activism of charities such as Amnesty International. It is welcome that some progress has been made in recent months, especially regarding the communications blackout. Nevertheless, the people of Kashmir should never have been placed under such strict rules.

As many know, over the past year the number of political and human rights detainees has increased into the thousands. What is more worrying is that those political and community leaders are not being offered a fair trial. Under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, the court rules specify a 14-day limit for lodging an application for a hearing, but that process has not been followed, meaning that people are still in prison, with no prospect of a fair trial. That failure of the courts has become particularly urgent since a shocking wave of arrests in October last year.

Yesterday, our Government took a positive step in condemning the Chinese Government's treatment of religious minorities, as UK businesses will face fines if their products are linked to forced labour in China's Xinjiang region. However, more needs to be done, otherwise millions of Muslim people will continue to live in oppression, fearing for their constitutional freedom and, ultimately, for their own lives.

I will close by echoing the points made already. We need to remember that two nuclear powers are involved in the tension. It must become more of a concern to the international community. We must ensure that we do all we can to protect the fundamental human rights of the Kashmir people.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): I can allow another five-minute limit.

4.54 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Davies, and it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) on securing this debate.

In 1945, the world set up the United Nations, with peace, justice and international co-operation in mind. At the signing of the UN charter, which was signed by 50 nations, including ours, President Truman famously said:

"If we had had this Charter a few years ago—and above all, the will to use it—millions now dead would be alive. If we should falter in the future in our will to use it, millions now living will surely die."

For Members across this House and to those who listen to my words after this debate, the charter lives on today but, tragically for the people of Kashmir, the will to use it does not.

UN Security Council resolution 47, which provides for the right of a plebiscite for the people of Kashmir, has existed since 1948. The will to implement still does not. Seventy-four years on, the trajectory for the people of Kashmir is leading to a future far from a right of

self-determination and closer to one of non-existence. But let us put history to one side for a second. In 2019, India unilaterally revoked article 370, removing the special status of Kashmir, outrightly defying the United Nations resolution, setting back previously agreed international resolutions such as the Simla agreement, arresting Kashmiri political leaders, enforcing curfews, implementing a media blackout, and denying internationally agreed principles of human rights for Kashmiri people. I ask this House and our Government: apart from the words of condemnation, what else do the people of Kashmir get?

From the start of 2010 to the 2019 siege, the Kashmiri people have been shut off from the entire world—occupied by more than 600,000 Indian soldiers, in the largest military operation in the world; Kashmiri women targeted for rape; 250 Kashmiris killed; 1,500 injured; 657 houses destroyed; 4,815 cordon and search operations during the past one year alone; political leaders under house arrest and put through kangaroo courts; thousands of non-Kashmiri Hindus of India issued with domicile certificates; and the Indian Government proactively changing the very demographics of Kashmir, leading only to a path of ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri people. Without the UN rapporteurs allowed into the region, and with every report out of the region censored, how can anyone assure this House that a genocide in Kashmir is not taking place?

From 2015 to last year, Britain sold more than half a billion pounds-worth of arms to India, which will contribute to shedding the blood of the Kashmiri people. Without the reassurances from the UN, we cannot be sure that we are not contributing to a genocide. As a proud daughter of Kashmir, I simply ask the Minister whether the Prime Minister, who has now cancelled his visit to India, will follow on and cancel the shipment of arms to India? We do not need international leaders and Governments protesting with words; we have activists on the streets for that. We need international leaders and Governments with the will to take action and stop genocide taking place. The time to act is now. Will the Minister act now while there is still time, or history will not be so forgiving?

Philip Davies (in the Chair): We can retain a five-minute limit. I call Robbie Moore.

4.58 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) for securing this really important debate. I want to say a huge thanks to all my constituents who contacted me specifically on this issue. I know it sits very close to their hearts.

Kashmir has been living under heavy lockdown restrictions since August 2019, following the special status of Jammu and Kashmir being revoked by India. We should be clear about what these lockdowns actually mean. No foreign journalists are being allowed into Kashmir by the Indian Government. Thousands of people have been arrested and face harassment and imprisonment without due cause: lawyers, small business owners, journalists, students and of course human rights activists. Phone lines have been blocked and internet access taken away. Although some communication has been restored, it is patchy and heavily controlled by the Government.

[Robbie Moore]

Legal reforms have been made so that residents' property rights can be revoked. Properties have been destroyed and innocent people are losing their lives. It is reported that nearly 300 Kashmiris have been killed and over 1,600 injured, and more than 900 houses have been destroyed since special status was revoked. That, quite rightly, is causing a huge amount of concern for many of my constituents across Keighley. These stories are being reported to me—to all of us, as we have heard—and they are harrowing.

Of course, as elected politicians in the United Kingdom we cannot decide on domestic policy in another country, but we can use our influence to ensure that this terrible situation is investigated and that our Government use their weight to put on pressure to reach a solution. The UK's fundamental values are freedom and democracy. That applies not only to the situation in Kashmir, but around the world. Only yesterday, I said that to the Foreign Secretary during his statement on the terrible situation in western China.

I say to the Minister that now is the time to hear the allegations of human rights abuses from both sides of the line of control, but particularly from the Indian side. Only last October, speaking in the Middle East Institute in Washington DC, the world heard the President of Azad Kashmir accuse India of genocide. It is not in India's interest for those allegations to go stated without investigation. I call on the Government to take this issue extremely seriously.

I would like to see UN human rights officials get access to both sides of the line of control, to find out the facts. Of course, India and Pakistan are both longstanding friends of our country. That is strengthened by the large Indian and Pakistani communities across our country. But a solution to the situation in Kashmir must be sought—after all, both countries are nuclear powers—and it must be sought at speed.

I know the Prime Minister is due to visit India at some point. I hope that he will raise the issue directly with Prime Minister Modi and seek his reassurances that all is being done to seek a solution. The UK must stand for freedom and democracy. That applies around the world, including in Kashmir.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): We will keep the five-minute limit going.

5.2 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship in this important debate, Mr Davies, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) for securing it.

For the sake of time, I will not give hon. Members a history lesson on this part of the world. The central point I want to make is that what happens in Kashmir matters in the UK. It matters in Peterborough, because my home city has a large and vibrant Kashmiri population. That diaspora has many friends and family members on both sides of the line of control. Whatever community they are from, people cannot grow up in Peterborough without being touched by this issue. If it matters to the large Kashmiri diaspora, surely it matters to British parliamentarians and the British Government. The area is bordered by three nuclear powers and the UK also has an historical responsibility for the region.

Most of all, this is about human rights, murder and torture. The Government take seriously what is going on in China with the Uyghur Muslim population, and the same must apply in this case. I stand with the hundreds of millions of Indians across the world who are equally concerned about human rights abuses in Kashmir.

It certainly cannot be in the interest of the Indian Government for allegations of human rights abuses to be made repeatedly. Why do they not allow them to be independently investigated? My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) was planning to raise that point today, but, regrettably, he is self-isolating. Muslims in the UK must feel that atrocities and crimes affecting fellow Muslims across the world are a priority for this Government. What the Government have done with the Rohingya and Uyghurs, as well as persecuted Christians, they must now do for Kashmir.

India is a friend of the UK, and friends should be able to talk honestly and openly with one another, so I would urge Ministers to raise with their Indian counterparts the arbitrary detention of Kashmiri political leaders, the 18-month arbitrary enforced lockdown on the Kashmiri people, the ban on access to 4G and the internet in that part of the world, the crackdown on a free and fair media and the allegations of appalling human rights abuses.

Finally and briefly, I would like to counter a narrative that I have heard many times before, which is that the resolution to this dispute is a bilateral approach between India and Pakistan. On the Falklands, the UK Government assert that self-determination is a universal right enshrined in the UN charter and applies in the case of the Falkland Islanders. On Gibraltar, Spain insists on a bilateral agreement with the UK over sovereignty, whereas this Government will discuss sovereignty only if the Gibraltarians themselves are included in these discussions. Surely, what is good for the people of the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar is also good enough for the people of Kashmir.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): We will keep the five-minute limit for Jim Shannon.

5.6 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): If you had asked me at the beginning whether I would get five minutes, I would have told you I would only get three, Mr Davies. I am pleased to have the five, and I will probably take the whole five as well, just to let you know, and I thank you for calling me to speak.

I thank the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) for raising this important issue. I congratulate her on setting the scene so well. I state my interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the Pakistani minorities and chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief. My work with both groups has led me to be very concerned about the human rights situations in both India and Pakistan. I want to give a broad-based account of both, if I can. I had the privilege to lead a debate yesterday on the persecution of minority groups in India, and some hon. Members in the Chamber participated in that. I also travelled with colleagues to Pakistan in 2018 to raise similar issues.

I will focus my comments on instances of persecution and human rights violations within both the India and Pakistan-administered areas of Kashmir. I had the opportunity to meet the governor of Pakistan-administered Kashmir and got a good insight into what was happening. With regards to the India-administered area, I am concerned about the incredible loss of life over the last decade. Some 1,081 civilians have been killed by security forces in extrajudicial killings between 2008 and 2018. It is deeply concerning that according to UN reports there seem to be no investigations of the use of excessive force by authorities and no prosecutions. It does not even appear that Indian security forces have been asked to re-evaluate or change their crowd control techniques or rules of engagement.

Beyond the violations of the right to life, many other human rights concerns emerged following the Indian Government's unilateral annulment of the semi-autonomous states of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019. In order to prevent protests about the decision, authorities initiated a massive deployment of troops and arbitrarily arrested hundreds of Kashmiri leaders and activists. They even detained 144 children—my goodness me. What threat is there in children? The Indian authorities also imposed broad restrictions on freedom of movement, banned public meetings, and shut down telecommunications and educational institutions.

The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimated that in the first three months of the lockdown the economy lost \$2.4 billion, which is an enormous loss to bear for any country. While most of those arbitrarily detained by authorities have been released, there are still more 400 people who remain in custody under the draconian Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, 1978. That is clearly a violation of human rights. There is also a freedom of religion or belief element to the human rights violations of Kashmir, such as the shutting down of many mosques and restrictions on gatherings at Muslim shrines or at religious festivals. I express my concern about that.

Turning to the Pakistan-administered territories of Kashmir, they are not lily white. I have to say that and I want to make some comments on it. They have problems with poor relationships, too. They amended their interim constitution in 2018 to define who is a real Muslim—I expressed concern about that when I was in Pakistan—and used that definition to discriminate against the minority Ahmadiyya community, who are the loveliest group of people who you will ever meet, Mr Davies. Their motto is “love for all, hatred for none”; we could all take that as our motto and live it out.

The same blasphemy provisions that were often misused to persecute both religious and non-religious groups in Pakistan are still a problem in some provinces. According to the UN, members of nationalist and pro-independence political parties often report threats, intimidation and even arrest for their political activities at the hands of local authorities and the intelligence agency. There is credible information about the enforced disappearances of people from Pakistan-administered Kashmir. All those things are backed up by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. They have the facts and the evidence, and they say it.

I might slow down, because I know I have a minute left. I have lots of concerns about freedom of expression. Journalists in Pakistan-administered Kashmir continue

to face threats and harassment in the course of carrying out their professional duties. The hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) referred to that, and there is no need to say it again, but I believe that it violates the right of freedom of expression. I want to put on the record that it is clearly a gross violation of freedom of expression for the constitution to determine what political views it is acceptable for citizens to express.

I want to end by expressing my sincere hope that the United Kingdom Government can use their influence with India and Pakistan to help improve the human rights situation for all those living in Kashmir. I look to the Minister, who gave us an excellent response to our debate yesterday, and we appreciate that. I believe it is time that our Government encouraged authorities to grant access to all EU and UN independent experts and international human rights monitoring mechanisms. Let us do our best for the people in Kashmir. They deserve it. Every one of us wants to ensure that their civil rights and human rights are protected.

5.11 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) on securing this vital debate. She made a powerful speech that painted a harrowing picture of the plight of the Kashmiri people and the human rights crisis that they are facing. I also thank the other contributors to the debate, who made a number of compelling points—not least my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah).

The Labour party's new foreign policy puts the rule of law, democracy and human rights at the very heart of our global agenda, and we of course apply those principles to Jammu and Kashmir, as we do consistently to every other part of the world. The situation in Kashmir is defined tragically by a long history of political and military conflict. In 1947, the British state was a signatory, as the departing colonial power, to the instrument of accession, which gave Kashmir a high degree of autonomy, while granting India control over Kashmir's communications, defence and foreign affairs.

Countless attempts have been made to resolve the Kashmir issue through UN resolutions and by other means. Perhaps the most significant was the Simla agreement, which was concluded following the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971. The Labour party strongly supports the conclusions of the Simla agreement and agrees that issues involving India, Pakistan and Jammu and Kashmir should be negotiated between the parties, and that no state should deploy force or act unilaterally. We also recognise that the UK has a particular responsibility to do all it can to help secure a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

If we fast forward 50 years from Simla, we see that the situation on the ground in Kashmir is bleak. At 72 years, the conflict is the longest unresolved conflict on the agenda of the United Nations. Some accounts claim that as many as 95,000 have been killed in the past 30 years alone. Kashmir is the most militarised place on earth. Moreover, it has become a political football in almost a great game, a great power competition between India, China and Pakistan, all of which have nuclear capability. This is a very dangerous game to be playing.

[Stephen Kinnock]

On 5 August 2019, the Indian Government's Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill unilaterally revoked article 370 and replaced the autonomous state of Jammu and Kashmir with two new union territories governed directly by New Delhi: Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. Further to that intervention, Jammu and Kashmir has been in an Indian army-imposed lockdown, with the Indian Government citing security risks and the need to prevent violence. The lockdown, along with a communications blackout and an internet ban, has had a profound and far-reaching impact on every aspect of life in Kashmir, including health services, school closures and media freedom. The Indian Government maintain that their decision to unilaterally revoke article 370, and the ensuing lockdown, is an internal matter, as such actions do not interfere with the boundaries of the territory or the line of control. India also cites security concerns, based on attacks by what New Delhi believes to be Pakistan-backed militant groups. Indeed, we recall with sadness the tragic suicide-bomb attack on 14 February 2019, which targeted Indian soldiers in Kashmir.

Meanwhile, the Labour party recognises that those who are opposed to the revocation of article 370 and the subsequent lockdown are understandably angered by what they see as a unilateral act of aggression on the part of the Indian Government. I assure hon. Members that the Labour party will always speak up vociferously in defence of the human rights of the people of Kashmir. We also recognise the hardship faced by those living in Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir, where the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Elections Act 2020 clearly contravened universal freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

In a letter to the Muslim Council of Britain on 8 May, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made clear that all sides must play their part in ending the conflict, which has gone on for far too long. He said that

“the Labour party will always uphold and respect international law and will always stand up for human rights and for the rule of law.

Our position on Kashmir has not changed, we support and recognise previous UN resolutions on the rights of the Kashmiri people but maintain that if we are to find a lasting settlement, to end this ongoing conflict, that can only be achieved”

by

“India and Pakistan working together, with the people of Kashmir.”

What can the UK Government do to support the peaceful resolution of this conflict and defend and uphold the human rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir? Well, let me ask the Minister a few questions. Will he impress on his Indian and Pakistani counterparts the need for a plan to demilitarise the larger Kashmir region, and ask what steps the Indian Government are taking to uphold human rights in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in the light of the events of 5 August 2019? That conversation must include the rights of political prisoners.

What meetings has the Minister had with human rights organisations about the situation in Jammu and Kashmir? Does the Minister give support to the International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir, which seeks to address the human rights situation in Kashmir following the events of 5 August 2019? Does the

Minister have any plans to send his own UK delegation to Jammu and Kashmir to assess the human rights situation and report back to our Parliament? Finally, will the UK Government commit to doing all they can to support and work with, wherever helpful and necessary, representatives from India, Pakistan and Jammu and Kashmir, including all five regions, to deliver justice, peace and resolution to that terrible conflict? I look forward to the Minister's response.

5.18 pm

The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) for securing the debate, and to all hon. Members for their contributions. We have heard some really passionate speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Bury North (James Daly), for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe), for Keighley (Robbie Moore), and for Peterborough (Paul Bristow), from the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), and from the hon. Members for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), for Bradford West (Naz Shah), and for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

The situation in Kashmir undoubtedly elicits strong feelings and is of great concern to the Government. I assure the hon. Member for Luton North that my colleague, the Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, regularly discusses Kashmir with representatives of the Governments of India and Pakistan. I hope to be able to address many of the issues that have been raised by hon. Members, and leave a bit of time for the hon. Lady to sum up at the end.

Pakistan and India, as we all know, are magnificent countries, as I said in yesterday's debate. We enjoy incredibly strong and enduring ties with both countries. We have long-standing partnerships with India and Pakistan, based on a wide range of shared interests, including trade, security, development and investment. The Indian and Pakistani diasporas are the largest in the UK, with over 3 million Brits having Indian or Pakistani heritage. These vibrant diaspora communities make a vital contribution to the richness and diversity of British society and the broad and deep relationships between our countries, and those ties enable close co-operation between our Governments. That was evident—as I am fully aware, because it happened within 72 hours of my taking on this role—when we supported the return of thousands of British nationals from India and Pakistan in the wake of the covid-19 outbreak.

Just before turning to the detail of the debate, it is important to highlight the impact that covid-19 has had in Kashmir. According to official figures, there are nearly 3,000 cases of covid-19 in India-administered Kashmir, and 13,000 cases in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. We are in regular contact with both Governments about the situation, and also discussing the economic and health implications of the pandemic in those countries.

Turning to Kashmir, I stress that the Government's policy remains stable; it is unchanged. We continue to believe that it is for India and Pakistan to find a lasting political resolution to the situation, one that takes into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people: as the hon. Members for Brent North and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) mentioned, this was laid out in the 1972 Simla agreement. It is not appropriate for the UK

Government to prescribe a solution or act as a mediator in this regard, but it would be wrong to not acknowledge that there are serious human rights concerns in both India-administered and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. This has been confirmed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in his reports, and has also rightly been raised by the hon. Member for Aberavon.

The situation in India-administered Kashmir has been of particular concern to many here today, including this Government, especially since the revocation of article 370 of the Indian constitution in 2019 and the introduction of a number of restrictions on assembly and communications by the Indian Government, which has been raised by many Members. We understand that some of these restrictions may have been relaxed, with broadband internet partially restored, along with some access to social media. This is welcome news, but more should be done, as the hon. Member for Luton North rightly says. There have been recent elections to the District Development Council in India-administered Kashmir, the first to take place since the revocation of article 370.

However, we are concerned that some restrictions remain in place, including on internet connectivity. This was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley, and I thank him for speaking up on behalf of the people of his constituency on the issue of Kashmir. We in the UK Government call for these restrictions to be lifted as soon as possible.

Barry Gardiner: The Minister mentioned the DDC elections. Would he confirm that over 50% of the population freely took part in those elections, and that the largest single party—as opposed to the combined parties—that won in those elections was, in fact, the Bharatiya Janata party?

Nigel Adams: I do not have the exact results of the election to hand, but I suspect the hon. Gentleman does, and I am more than happy to go along with him.

Since 2019, we have closely followed reports of detentions in India-administered Kashmir—I think my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North, who again has been a real champion on behalf of his constituents on the issue of Kashmir, raised this. We welcome the release last year of former Chief Ministers Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti. According to the Indian Government, all individuals who were detained under so-called preventive measures since the constitutional changes have now been released. That is welcome, but of course we will continue to monitor the situation closely.

The hon. Members for Luton North and for Bradford West rightly raised the issue of violence against women and girls and the use of rape as a weapon of war in Kashmir—a point that would also have been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), who we have heard today is, sadly, self-isolating. He has long been a champion for Kashmir. Affecting one in three worldwide, violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations of our time. Any allegations of human rights violations must be investigated promptly, thoroughly and transparently.

We are aware of the media reports that the hon. Member for Luton North raised that an Indian soldier has been charged with murder, kidnap and criminal conspiracy after the deaths of three Kashmiri men. We

welcome assurances from the Indian Government that the army is committed to ethical conduct in its operations and that disciplinary action will be undertaken in accordance with the law where necessary.

We have repeatedly raised our concerns about detentions and restrictions with the Indian Government. The Foreign Secretary has raised Kashmir with his counterparts, including during his visit to New Delhi last month, when he discussed the situation with his counterpart. He has urged, again, India and Pakistan to resolve their differences through dialogue. My noble friend Lord Ahmad is in regular contact with his counterparts, Indian and Pakistani Ministers and senior officials and most recently raised our concerns about the human rights issues with the Indian Foreign Secretary on 3 November. We reinforce these concerns through our high commissioners in New Delhi and Islamabad and here in London.

The hon. Member for Aberavon asked whether I would be trying to facilitate a visit. We are requesting permission for officials from our high commission to visit Kashmir as soon as the situation permits.

It is incumbent on all Governments to ensure that domestic laws are in line with international standards. Any allegations of human rights violations or abuses must be investigated promptly, thoroughly and transparently.

We heard a very moving speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn about her visit to Kashmir. She is an excellent advocate for the region. We call for all restrictions in Kashmir to be lifted as soon as possible.

The hon. Member for Luton North mentioned religious discrimination. We condemn any instances of discrimination, regardless of the country or faith involved. We urge India and Pakistan to exercise restraint across the line of control, to de-escalate tensions and to improve their lines of communication.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough spoke passionately about Kashmir on behalf of his constituents and urged us to raise those issues with the two sides. I can confirm that the Prime Minister has spoken with Prime Minister Modi of India and Prime Minister Khan of Pakistan about the importance of keeping channels of communication open and the importance of managing regional tensions.

The people of Kashmir deserve the opportunity to thrive and succeed, so, more broadly, we welcome the commitment that the Indian Government have made to the economic and social development of India-administered Kashmir. We continue to seek further details of their plans.

Let me end by reassuring hon. Members that the situation in Kashmir remains an important issue for the Government. We continue to talk frankly to the Governments of India and Pakistan about our human rights concerns and to call for all remaining restrictions in India-administered Kashmir to be lifted as soon as possible. We strongly believe that everyone everywhere should enjoy equal rights and protections under the law.

5.29 pm

Sarah Owen: I thank the Minister for his response. May I ask for a follow-up meeting to discuss some of the issues we did not get to touch on today? An hour is far too short to discuss an issue as complex as Kashmir.

[Sarah Owen]

I thank hon. Members for their heartfelt contributions and concerns, which are cross-party, as has been mentioned time and again. That goes to the heart of the point that this is a human rights issue and is not something that divides us politically. If we care about human rights, it does not matter where in the world the human rights abuses are taking place or who is being abused, we have to stand up and stand up loud and proud for those human rights.

On that note, I make a particular mention of freedom of expression. What we are seeing in Kashmir is only a snippet—it is only the surface of what is happening—because of the lack of transparency and the lack of freedom of expression.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 13 January 2021

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Contingencies Fund Advance

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): I hereby give notice that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will draw an advance from the contingencies fund totalling £5,023,479,000 to enable expenditure on covid-19 support packages for business to be spent ahead of the passage of the Supply and Appropriation Act in March 2021. The funding will go towards the following schemes:

Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG) (closed)—grants of up to £3,000 per four weeks for closed businesses:

The Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment—one-off grants worth up to £9,000 per business property;

a £500 million top up to the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) scheme in England.

	<i>Local Restrictions Support Grant (close) scheme</i>	<i>Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment</i>	<i>Additional Restrictions Grant scheme</i>	<i>Total £m</i>
RDEL	1,508.1	3,015.4	500.0	5,023.5

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £5,023,479,000 will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £5,023,479,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

The cash advance will be repaid upon receiving Royal Assent on the Supply and Appropriation Bill.

[HCWS703]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Gibraltar: Future Relationship with the EU

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): In the UK approach to negotiations on the future relationship with the EU as published in February 2020, the Government stated that they would act in these negotiations on behalf of all the territories for whose international relations the UK is responsible, which includes Gibraltar.

We have worked side by side with the Government of Gibraltar to honour this commitment. As a consequence of the EU's negotiating mandate which it adopted in February 2020, Gibraltar was not within scope of the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement (TCA). The Commission made a declaration alongside the TCA stating that this would "not preclude the possibility to have separate agreements between the Union and the United Kingdom in respect of Gibraltar", and that it stood ready "to examine any request from Spain, in agreement with the United Kingdom, to initiate the procedure for the negotiation of such separate agreements should they be compatible with Union law and Union interests".

To that end, the UK, working side by side with the Governments of Gibraltar and Spain, reached agreement on 31 December over a political framework to form the basis of a separate treaty between the UK and the EU regarding Gibraltar. We have sent this framework to the European Commission in order to initiate negotiations on the treaty.

The political framework covers issues of key importance to Gibraltar and the surrounding region, including on border fluidity. It creates the basis for a bespoke model for Gibraltar's future relationship with the EU that will permit an absence of physical checks at the land border with Spain, and therefore ensure fluidity of movement of people and goods between Gibraltar and the EU. The Governments of both the UK and Gibraltar judge that this framework provides a firm basis to safeguard Gibraltar's interests.

The UK and Gibraltar are committed to ensuring that cross-border arrangements can continue in the interim, until a new treaty enters into force. Arrangements have been agreed with Spain that include provisions for the border (goods and people), road transport, healthcare, waste disposal, and data. In addition, the UK Government provided financial and other support to ensure that Gibraltar was fully prepared for the end of the transition period.

We remain steadfast in our support for Gibraltar, and its sovereignty is safeguarded.

[HCWS705]

PRIME MINISTER

Council of Europe: UK Delegation

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): The hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Cherilyn Mackrory) has been appointed as a substitute Member of the United Kingdom Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) has been appointed as a full Member in place of the right hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale). The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) has been appointed as Leader of the UK Delegation.

[HCWS704]

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