

**Wednesday
14 April 2021**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 14 April 2021

House of Commons

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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

COP26

The President of COP26 was asked—

Covid-19: Green Recovery

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to promote climate action and a green recovery from the covid-19 pandemic ahead of COP26. [914039]

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to promote climate action and a green recovery from the covid-19 pandemic ahead of COP26. [914040]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): The Prime Minister's 10-point plan sets out our blueprint for a green industrial revolution—a plan to invest in green technologies and industries, leveraging in billions of pounds of private sector investment, supporting up to a quarter of a million green jobs and levelling up across the UK. It is a clear plan to build back greener from the covid pandemic.

Fleur Anderson: The UK's credibility as COP President rests on demonstrable climate action at home. The Government have set legally binding net zero targets but they are currently off track to meet their fourth and fifth carbon budgets, which are calibrated for previous, more lenient targets. Scrapping the green homes grant two weeks ago puts us into reverse. How will the right hon. Gentleman seek to progress local, national and international progress on energy efficiency and specifically on green homes in the run-up to and during COP26?

Alok Sharma: The UK has decarbonised its economy faster than any other G20 nation since 2000. We have met carbon budgets CB1 and CB2, we are on track to meet CB3, and of course we are pursuing plans to ensure that we meet CB4 and CB5. Ahead of COP26, we will publish a comprehensive net zero strategy.

Andrew Gwynne [V]: The COP President has talked confidently about British leadership, but the Prime Minister's 10-point plan is full of big words and no real detail.

The total impact, by the Government's own admission, is that they will not meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets. When we pull back the curtain, there is not much to look at, and we are running out of time. He has just said, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), that there will be a net zero strategy. We need it before the summer recess to make the Government's word credible ahead of COP26. Does he agree with that, and if so, what is he doing about it?

Alok Sharma: As someone who was partly responsible for preparing the 10-point plan, may I suggest that the hon. Gentleman actually reads the detail of it? I have discussed the sector-specific points in it with individuals in different sectors of industry, who have found it quite compelling. Of course I agree that we need to be doing more, and that is why I have committed to publishing the comprehensive net zero strategy ahead of COP26.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con) [V]: What steps is my right hon. Friend taking, in his extensive discussions with leaders around the world on making progress at COP26, to develop a global standard or taxonomy of climate change impact in financial reporting and in green labelling investment products?

Alok Sharma: As my right hon. Friend will know, the UK has taken a leading role in climate-related disclosures by implementing a green taxonomy and, very importantly, by making TCFD-aligned disclosures—recommended by the Taskforce on Climate-related Financial Disclosures—mandatory across the economy by 2025. In the conversations that I have with Governments around the world, I am urging other countries to follow a similar approach on financial disclosures. My right hon. Friend talks about asset owners in the financial services sector, and we are also encouraging asset owners and asset managers to make net zero commitments.

Tackling Climate Change: International Ambition

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): What progress the Government have made on raising international ambition to tackle climate change as part of preparations for COP26. [914041]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): When the UK took on the role of the incoming COP26 presidency, under 30% of the global economy was covered by a net zero commitment. The good news is that that figure has now increased to 70% and of course I am pressing all countries to come forward with net zero commitments. However, as colleagues in this House have acknowledged previously, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's initial "NDC Synthesis Report", published in February, showed that we have much more progress to make on the 2030 emissions reduction target, and I am pressing countries on that as well.

Ruth Edwards [V]: The UK is a global leader in protecting the ocean, as shown by the success of its Blue Belt and 30x30 programmes, but as my right hon. Friend will know, only 1% of international waters currently have effective protection. Will he commit the UK to taking the lead in pushing for a strong global oceans

treaty at the United Nations, to establish an international framework for protecting marine biodiversity in international waters?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend raises a vital issue, and she will be pleased to hear that the UK is working hard to see negotiations concluded this year on a new UN convention for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdictions. That will enable the establishment of marine protected areas and help to deliver on the 30x30 target.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): In a letter to all UNFCCC—United Nations framework convention on climate change—parties this week, the COP President rightly argued that we must halve global emissions by 2030 if we are to keep the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5° within reach, yet he will know that recent UN analysis makes it clear that current national pledges will reduce emissions by just 1% by the end of this critical decade. We need the major emitters to do much more if we are to close the gap. That means a need for deep cuts in American emissions and for Chinese emissions to peak by 2025, but it also means a need for tangible progress on the part of India. With the Prime Minister meeting President Modi later this month, will the COP President tell the House what the UK is willing to put on the table, particularly in terms of climate finance and technological support, to help to ensure that India feels able to increase its ambition markedly ahead of the summit?

Alok Sharma: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman but, of course, all countries need to make much more progress when it comes to ambitious, nationally determined contributions to the 2030 near-term emission reduction targets. I have spoken with large economies around the world. As he knows, I met Prime Minister Modi a few weeks ago and, of course, we are working on a number of initiatives with the Indian Government. When the Prime Minister goes to India, I am sure there will be further announcements.

Virtual Participation in COP26

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What plans he has to arrange for remote virtual participation in COP26 in the event of ongoing restrictions due to the covid-19 pandemic. [914042]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): We are working very hard to ensure that we deliver an in-person COP that allows all countries to participate on an equal footing. That is incredibly important, as many parties feel strongly that negotiations must be in person. We continue to explore how technology and other innovations can make the summit more resilient, safe and inclusive.

Martyn Day [V]: I am grateful for that answer. Many respondents to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee's survey of expert views, both academics and former COP attendees, highlighted the value of remote participation for otherwise excluded groups, and for reducing the conference's carbon footprint. Will the COP26 President explore the possibilities of wider virtual participation at COP, in addition to physical attendance at the conference?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I have said on a number of occasions that I want this to be the most inclusive COP ever. Absolutely, we are looking at how we can expand our digital programmes to allow for more virtualisation. I hope that, at the appropriate time, I will be able to update the House further.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): A diplomatic source in the British Government is reported in the papers today as saying about the conference:

"No one in Europe thinks it's going to happen and the US is increasingly sceptical that it can happen without a delay."

I support the COP26 President's aim for a physical conference of national delegations but, of course, many stakeholders are politicians, business leaders, NGOs and others. When will the Cabinet Office produce a contingency plan to give clarity to stakeholders about how engagement can take place in November?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Gentleman, again, raises an important point. He will have seen the letter I wrote to UNFCCC members on the progress we want to make over the coming months. COP26 has already been postponed by one year, and the urgency of the climate crisis has not abated. I do not sense any desire among parties for a further postponement, and we are working very hard to ensure that we have an in-person, physical COP, taking into account, of course, any covid-related contingencies.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to encourage towns, cities and communities to deliver the UN sustainable development goals at local level in the run-up to COP26. [914043]

Mr Speaker: Vice-president?

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Thank you, Mr Speaker. That is a new title. I was happy with international champion, but I am sure vice-president is acceptable, too.

The actions we are taking to tackle climate change support the delivery of a range of UN sustainable development goals. Through the Together for Our Planet campaign and Race to Zero, we are encouraging towns, cities and communities to drive climate action at a local level. This is supported by the COP26 UK mayors and regions advisory council, which includes West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Kirklees Council, and it has set itself an ambitious target of being net zero by 2038.

Mr Sheerman [V]: Will the Minister and, certainly, the COP26 President, in whom I have great confidence, support what we are doing in Huddersfield to make Huddersfield a sustainable town and a sustainable community by rigorously pursuing the sustainable development goals? We are building a network of towns across the United Kingdom. We are up to about 20, and we need to get to 50 and 500. What can the Government do to help us, because it is about grassroots and making sure that COP26 is not cop-out 26?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: It is important that we encourage and, indeed, provide the tools—and the Together for Our Planet campaign is one of those tools—to help our constituents, our towns and our cities to understand and take charge for themselves of the impact they can have in helping to meet our Paris agreement challenge. That involves everything from household choices through to changes in how we run our buses and trains. Every council and every community has a role to play.

Green Investment and Public Transport

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on showing leadership on green investment and boosting funding for public transport in the run-up to COP26. [914044]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues about decarbonisation. My right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary is putting a green recovery for transport at the centre of his Department's decision making in the run-up to COP26 and beyond.

Kim Johnson: Liverpool city region is developing a project to bring 20 hydrogen-powered double-decker buses to the streets, with the potential for further green investment to scale this up and achieve our ambition of being carbon net zero by 2040. Can the Minister tell us when the £30 billion in planned capital investment as part of the green recovery stimulus will be available to support our ambition?

Alok Sharma: I will ensure that the hon. Lady's specific point is taken up with my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary. She will know that, last month, the Transport Secretary launched a multimillion-pound scheme to enable local authorities to roll out zero-emission buses. This funding will deliver 500 zero-emission buses, supporting the Government's wider commitment to introduce 4,000 such vehicles.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP) [V]: There is no joined-up thinking on any issue with this Government, but we would all have hoped for some cross-Department thinking on this issue at least. We are, as usual, disappointed, with even the green homes grant gone after just a few months—so much for building back better.

There is increasing concern voiced internationally, too, about the UK Government's lack of progress domestically on environmental commitments. Will the right hon. Gentleman show some real leadership and commit today to start seriously lobbying his Government colleagues to join up the dots and start delivering, so that we can look forward to environmentally sound investment, renewed support for a comprehensive charging framework for electric vehicles, real investment in hydrogen technology and marine energy, support for housing improvements and so on? Will he do that, or is he happy to leave us all embarrassed to be hosting COP26 while the UK seems to be striding off in the opposite direction?

Alok Sharma: I say to the hon. Lady that the role of the COP presidency is to ensure that we are working with all 197 parties to ensure that we are making progress on keeping the 1.5° C limit within reach. The

UK, like any other country, needs to see what more we can do. I hope that she will acknowledge that we are seen as a leader in the world and that, since 2010, we have decarbonised our economy faster than any other G20 nation.

Biodiversity Loss and Climate Action

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): What steps he is taking to promote action on biodiversity loss alongside climate action as part of COP26 preparations. [914045]

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Climate change and biodiversity loss are inextricably linked, which is why the UK has made nature a core priority of our COP26 presidency. We pioneered and launched the leaders' pledge for nature in September last year, and we are also driving global action to protect and restore critical ecosystems such as forests and accelerating our transition towards sustainable agriculture while mobilising the finance to support this.

Mr Dhesi: In order to tackle biodiversity loss, the convention on biological diversity, COP15, in May, will support new targets on nature. However, with the Environment Bill delayed yet again, how will the Minister ensure that the outcomes from this conference will feed into COP26 in November?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The Prime Minister and President Xi have agreed that the UK and China should work together, as respective hosts of the United Nations framework convention on climate change COP26 and the convention on biological diversity COP15, to reinforce and amplify those linkages between climate change and biodiversity loss and to achieve mutually supportive and ambitious outcomes at both summits. We are working closely with our Chinese counterparts and with the UN secretariat of the UNFCCC, the CBD and the United Nations convention to combat desertification to strengthen the links between these conventions to deliver the best outcomes for nature.

Highest-Emitting Countries: Policy Objectives

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in countries that are the highest emitters of carbon on policy objectives for COP26. [914046]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): I have so far engaged with Ministers and negotiators from more than 80 countries and briefed all parties to the UN on a number of occasions. This, of course, includes discussions with representatives of countries, including China, the US, the EU and India.

Virginia Crosbie: In the light of Germany's coal phase-out Act, which states that it will not end the use of coal-powered energy until 2038, how does the Minister intend to use COP26 to promote nuclear power, particularly at key UK sites such as Wylfa Newydd on Anglesey, in order to meet the UK's net zero targets?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend is a consistent and strong champion of both the nuclear sector and the Wylfa site in her constituency, and I commend her zeal. As I have said to her previously, nuclear power clearly has a role to play in our clean energy mix as we work towards net zero emissions by 2050. She will know that, in the 10-point plan that the Prime Minister set out, we are backing large nuclear as well as small modular reactors and advanced modular reactors.

Business Consultation

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): What steps he is taking to consult businesses in preparation for COP26. [914047]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): I have engaged with hundreds of global and UK businesses through a combination of speaking at high-profile events and bilateral meetings, and my COP26 business leaders advisory group. Businesses have a key role to play in tackling climate change, and I encourage them all to sign up to the Race to Zero campaign.

Mark Fletcher: Derbyshire County Council recently launched a £2 million green entrepreneurs fund for businesses that are interested in green energy and carbon reduction. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is an excellent example of local government and businesses working together, and will he share my praise for county council leader Barry Lewis and his visionary leadership on this issue?

Alok Sharma: I commend both my hon. Friend and the leader of Derbyshire County Council, Barry Lewis, for championing this excellent initiative. This is precisely the type of scheme we want to see—supporting businesses, growth and jobs while cutting emissions.

Civil Society and Youth Groups: Consultation

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): What steps he is taking to consult with (a) civil society and (b) youth groups in preparation for COP26. [914048]

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con): What steps he is taking to consult youth groups in preparation for COP26. [914052]

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): What steps he is taking to consult with (a) civil society and (b) youth groups in preparation for COP26. [914056]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): I want COP26 to be the most inclusive ever. The voices of young people are vital to this process. That is why I have set up an international COP26 Civil Society and Youth Advisory Council, allowing for a regular dialogue with youth activists, NGOs, indigenous people and faith groups as we plan for COP26.

David Johnston: I have a pile of letters on my desk from children at GEMS Didcot Primary Academy and John Blandy Primary School, who have written to tell me what they have learned about climate change and what positive changes they saw in the environment during lockdown, and to give me their ideas of things

they think the Government should be doing. Will my right hon. Friend tell me how children and young people will be able to feed into the preparations for COP26?

Alok Sharma: I thank my hon. Friend for championing the views of young people in his constituency. I pay tribute to the pupils of John Blandy and GEMS Didcot primary schools for their enthusiasm for climate action. I will be delighted to receive their letters and review their ideas; and, through him, I will respond in writing to his constituents.

Laura Farris [V]: My right hon. Friend and I both have the privilege of representing seats in Berkshire, where many young people are passionate about climate change and are active in local groups such as the West Berkshire Climate Action Network. This is their first real opportunity to see UK leadership in action. Will my right hon. Friend confirm how those young people can access the youth council that he just described and other mechanisms to feed their ideas into the COP later this year?

Alok Sharma: I thank my hon. Friend for the work that she does to promote climate action. I would be very happy to hear from young people and youth groups in her constituency. We will be engaging further with schools in relation to COP26 to unleash the enthusiasm and energy of young people across the UK and tackle climate change.

Suzanne Webb: We all have a stake in protecting our climate, particularly young adults in my constituency, who I hope will be the pioneers of change. As part of the UK-Italy COP26 partnership, what are the plans for the “Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition 2021” event to be held in Milan in September?

Alok Sharma: From 28 to 30 September, the Youth4Climate event will bring together 400 youth delegates from across the globe to discuss topics under a range of thematic areas. The event will culminate in a declaration and discussion between the youth delegates and Ministers attending the pre-COP26 event.

Topical Questions

[914079] **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

COP26 President (Alok Sharma): If we are to protect our planet from the ravages of climate change, we must support developing countries to respond, but without adequate finance the task ahead is well nigh impossible. That is why on 31 March, the UK presidency convened around 50 developing and donor countries and multilateral institutions to consider how we can get more—and more timely—public finance flowing into climate action. I am pleased that we have secured a range of commitments from the likes of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and donor countries to move this vital work forward. It is our moral duty to protect the most vulnerable communities from a climate crisis that they have not caused.

Debbie Abrahams [V]: How does supporting a new Cumbrian coalmine, giving new licences for oil and gas exploration, scrapping the green homes grant and reducing incentives for electric vehicles reflect the Government's stated commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050—or is this more dad-dancing rhetoric by the Prime Minister, unconvincing and unco-ordinated?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Lady raises a number of points. In previous answers I have set out the ambition that the UK has and the progress that we have made. Specifically with regard to oil and gas licensing, the UK Government will introduce a new climate compatibility checkpoint before each future oil and gas licensing round to ensure that licences awarded are aligned with wider climate objectives, including net zero emissions by 2050.

[914089] **Cherilyn Mackrory** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con) [V]: Surfers Against Sewage in my constituency are ardent environmental campaigners, particularly on plastic pollution and water quality, and our environment is all the better for their work. The Government have a key role to play on protecting the environment, so can my right hon. Friend assure me that when the world gathers for COP26 in November, protecting and enhancing the environment, particularly for the people of Cornwall, will be at the very top of the agenda?

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The COP26 nature campaign is driving ambitious international and domestic action to protect and enhance our environment, and this will be a high priority at COP26 in November. I commend the work that Surfers Against Sewage are doing on water pollution and water quality, which I hope to see first-hand when I visit Cornwall as part of the G7 summit in June. Protecting the ocean, including through nature-based solutions, provides multiple vital climate change adaptation and resilience benefits.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): Last month, the COP President wrote that the world is doing nowhere near enough to limit global warming to 1.5° C, and he is right. A green economic stimulus could make a huge difference to meeting the target, but while we have put it as the top item of the G7 agenda, the sum total of the Chancellor's measures here in the UK promised just £12 billion of green spending over a decade, and he has already cut £1 billion from that. Our investment is 60 times smaller than President Biden's green infrastructure plan. Is it not a very significant challenge for COP26 that when it comes to a green stimulus we are telling others to act but not doing so ourselves?

Alok Sharma: The right hon. Gentleman knows that we agree on many of these issues on tackling climate change, but when it comes to Government money, we have also ensured that we leverage in private sector money. It is not just about Government money; it is also about leveraging in private sector money. Ultimately, this is about not just cutting emissions but creating jobs for constituents across the UK.

Edward Miliband: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, as COP26 host, our actions face particular scrutiny, and I think he will know that the international community is increasingly concerned, and not just on green recovery.

The Government call on others to power past coal but flirt with a new coalmine; say to others, "Adopt a net zero target", but are off track on ours; and tell countries to support the world's poorest but slash aid spending. Rachel Kyte, former special representative of the UN Secretary-General, said this week of our record on climate:

"What the UK is doing is like dad dancing...they are very uncoordinated."

Is it not time the Government gave up the dad dancing on climate and showed some consistent leadership?

Alok Sharma: The right hon. Gentleman himself is obviously a very good dancer and therefore unlikely to take part in dad dancing; we should try it together at some point.

Of course every country, including the UK, needs to make more progress on cutting emissions. The right hon. Gentleman makes particular reference to coal. He will know that our energy mix with regard to coal has gone from 40% in 2012 to less than 2% last year, and we have been leading the Powering Past Coal Alliance, to which a large number of countries have now signed up. So we are making progress; of course, there is more that we can do.

[914091] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What diplomatic steps has my right hon. Friend taken to engage with international partners on preparations for COP26?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: We are working closely at many levels with international partners on preparations for COP26 and to accelerate climate ambitions. The COP26 President-designate has met large numbers of Governments. He is already out and about visiting many countries—15 in the past few weeks—and briefing UN member states on a regular basis. I am working with the most vulnerable countries to make sure that they are supported in their ambitions to meet their resilience challenges.

[914080] **Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Converting UK homes to zero carbon heating will be a huge task. Does the COP President believe that heat pumps can adequately replace all gas boilers? If there is a need for supplementary heating, what form does he think it should take?

Alok Sharma: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the 10-point plan, which sets out clearly the progress that we want to make on decarbonising buildings and homes, and heat pumps will of course play a part. We have also set out there our plans on the use of hydrogen for home heating.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—
Engagements

[914249] **Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 14 April.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I know colleagues across the House will wish to join me in paying tribute to our dear friend and colleague, Dame Cheryl Gillan, who sadly died last week. MP for Chesham and Amersham for 29 years, she will be remembered for being a strong voice for her constituents, for being a brilliant campaigner, including her advocacy for autistic people and their families, and for being the first female Secretary of State for Wales. I also want to pay tribute to Baroness Shirley Williams, a pioneer for women in politics and in Government, and to our former colleague Peter Ainsworth, who was passionate about his causes, especially the environment.

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.

Mr Mohindra: Dame Cheryl represented her constituents with considerable effectiveness for nearly 29 years and is already sorely missed in this place, especially by many of the newer Members, as she was so kind to us in our first months in Westminster. One of her passions was the protection of chalk streams, in particular the River Chess, which passes through my constituency of South West Hertfordshire. Many MPs are increasingly concerned about reports of partially treated sewage being released into our rivers, with knock-on health impacts for both humans and animals. Can my right hon. Friend reassure the House that this Government will actively protect our rivers and streams?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right to raise the concern we fully share about sewage overflow into rivers such as the Chess. That is why we have set up the storm overflows taskforce to address the matter, working with the water industry, regulators and environmental groups. Last month, we announced plans for legislation to address that very issue.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): May I join the Prime Minister in his remarks about Dame Cheryl Gillan, who I worked with on a cross-party basis and remember with fondness? Ian Gibson also passed away this week. Both commanded respect on all sides of the House and will be sadly missed.

I also pay tribute to Shirley Williams. She was a great parliamentarian, and a formidable Minister and Cabinet Minister. She loved this House, the other place and, frankly, anywhere she could debate ideas and politics. For many years, she was Labour's loss, but today she is Britain's loss, and my thoughts are with her family and loved ones.

Does the Prime Minister believe that the current lobbying rules are fit for purpose?

The Prime Minister: I join the right hon. and learned Gentleman in what he said about Ian Gibson.

I share the widespread concern about some of the stuff we are reading at the moment, and I know that the Cabinet Secretary shares my concern as well. I do think it is a good idea in principle that top civil servants should be able to engage with business and should have experience of the private sector. When I look at the accounts I am reading today, it is not clear that those boundaries have been properly understood. I have asked for a proper independent review of the arrangements

that we have, to be conducted by Nigel Boardman, and he will be reporting in June. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman has any representations he wishes to make on the subject, he should do so to Mr Boardman.

Keir Starmer: I know that the Prime Minister is launching an inquiry. That inquiry is not even looking at the lobbying rules; I am not sure it is looking at very much at all. Every day, there is further evidence of the sleaze that is now at the heart of this Conservative Government. *[Interruption.]* They can shake their heads. Let us just look at the latest scandal. A wealthy businessman, Lex Greensill, was hired as a senior adviser to David Cameron when he was Prime Minister. We have all seen the business card. After he left office, Cameron became a paid lobbyist for Lex Greensill. The next thing we know, Cameron arranged access for Greensill to Cabinet Ministers, Ministers and senior officials, and he lobbied for taxpayers' money on behalf of Greensill Capital.

We also know that the Chancellor "pushed" officials. We know that the Health Secretary met Cameron and Greensill. We know that senior officials met Greensill Capital regularly, and now, even more unbelievably, we know that the Government's former head of procurement, no less, became a Greensill adviser while he was still a civil servant. Does the Prime Minister accept that there is a revolving door—indeed, an open door—between his Conservative Government and paid lobbyists?

The Prime Minister: This is a Government and a party that have been consistently tough on lobbying. Indeed, we introduced legislation saying that there should be no taxpayer-funded lobbying and that quangos should not be used to get involved with lobbying. We put in a register for lobbyists. There is one party that voted to repeal the 2014 lobbying Act, and that was the Labour party in its historic 2019 election manifesto, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has yet to repudiate. It did so because it thought the Act was unfair and restricted people's ability to make representations to politicians. I think that that is absurd. Will he now say that it is absurd to repeal the 2014 lobbying Act?

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister talks of the lobbying Act. Who was it who introduced that legislation? David Cameron. Who was it who voted for the legislation? Half the Conservative Front Bench. We said that it would not be tough enough, and where did that legislation lead? Two years later, David Cameron camping out in a Saudi desert with Lex Greensill, having a cup of tea. I rest my case in relation to that legislation.

Let me try another very simple question. Is the Prime Minister aware of any other Government official who had commercial links with Greensill or any other lobbying role while working in Government?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman has any such information, he should of course make it available to Mr Boardman; that is the point of his review. It is an independent review. It will be coming to me by June, and it will be laid in the Library of the House of Commons.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about lobbying. He is being advised by Lord Mandelson of Global Counsel. Perhaps in the interests of full transparency,

so that we can know where he is coming from, Lord Mandelson could be encouraged to disclose his other clients.

Keir Starmer: I have not heard a defence that ridiculous since my last days in the Crown court. It is called the shoplifters' defence—"Everyone else is nicking stuff, so why can't I?" It never worked. I remind the Prime Minister that I not only prosecuted shoplifters; I prosecuted MPs over the MPs' expenses scandal, so I stand on my record. That line just isn't going to wash with me.

It was a former Prime Minister—and, I suspect, now a former lobbyist—who once said:

"This isn't a minor issue with minor consequences... government contracts—worth hundreds of billions of pounds are potentially at stake."

Can the Prime Minister now answer the question that the Chancellor has been ducking for weeks? How was it that Greensill Capital—a company employing David Cameron—got the green light to give hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayer-backed loans?

The Prime Minister: While the right hon. and learned Gentleman was prosecuting MPs, I was cutting crime in London by 23% and cutting the murder rate by 50%. He asks about lobbying on behalf of Greensill. Again, I do not wish to embarrass the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but he does not have far to look. There was one person asking for Greensill bank to be able to use the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme, and that was the shadow Defence Secretary.

Keir Starmer: This just gets weaker and weaker. It does take me back to my defence days in the Crown court—just ridiculous. The shadow Defence Secretary—

The Prime Minister: It was rather a good point!

Keir Starmer: It really was not a good point; if you think that is a good point, you have got real problems.

The shadow Defence Secretary was speaking for his constituents and for local jobs. That is a million miles away from being a paid lobbyist texting friends in Government. The Prime Minister says there is going to be an inquiry, but the person he has appointed worked for the same law firm that lobbied to loosen lobbying laws. You could not make it up.

What we need is to overhaul the whole broken system. This afternoon, Labour's motion calls for a proper parliamentary inquiry into the scandal. If the Prime Minister is so concerned about this, he should welcome the motion. After all, to quote David Cameron, his old school friend:

"Sunlight is the best disinfectant".

So, will the Prime Minister vote with Labour today for a full, transparent, independent inquiry?

The Prime Minister: I think the right hon. and learned Gentleman would have been better off supporting the lobbying Act and the Labour party would have been better off not campaigning to get rid of it. It toughens up our laws, and I think that his own proposal is simply to have, yet again, politicians marking their own homework. What the country wants—[*Interruption.*] That is what it is—a Committee of MPs to look at it. It will not do a blind bit of good. That is why we are having a proper,

independent review. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman has any representations or allegations to make about what has taken place, he should make them to the eminent lawyer who has been asked to do this, who will be reporting to us by June.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister should be voting with us, not blocking a proper inquiry. The Greensill scandal is just the tip of the iceberg—dodgy contracts, privileged access, jobs for their mates. This is the return of Tory sleaze. It is now so ingrained in this Conservative Government. We do not need another Conservative party appointee marking their own homework. Actually, the more I listen to the Prime Minister, the more I think that Ted Hastings and AC-12 are needed to get to the bottom of this one.

We know the Prime Minister will not act against sleaze, but this House can, so can I urge all Members of the House to come together this afternoon to back Labour's motion, and to start to clean up the sleaze and cronyism that are at the heart of this Conservative Government?

The Prime Minister: That is why we are putting in an independent review. That is why we have tougher laws on lobbying—a great shame that Labour opposes them. Yes, we are getting on with rooting out bent coppers. We are also appointing and hiring thousands more police officers. We are fighting crime. We are fighting crime on the streets of our cities while the Opposition oppose the police and crime Bill, which would put in tougher sentences for serious sexual and violent offenders—absolutely—and they then encouraged people who went out and demonstrated to "Kill the Bill". We are getting on with protecting the public. That is absolutely correct. We are getting on with protecting the public of this country from crime of all kinds. We are getting on with the job of running this country, of rolling out a vaccination programme—

Mr Speaker: Order. Prime Minister, I think we ought to at least try and address the question.

[914251] **Dean Russell** (Watford) (Con): It is a year this week since I had the privilege of starting to volunteer at Watford General Hospital, and over that time I have been fortunate and privileged to work alongside some inspirational and selfless volunteers. As the nation reflects this week on the importance of schemes to support young people, may I ask the Prime Minister whether he will meet me to explore the creation of an NHS cadet scheme to pay tribute to those who have volunteered over the past year and also create a lasting legacy for generations to come?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed. I thank my hon. Friend for what he is doing. I thank everybody at Watford General Hospital for the support they have given throughout the pandemic, particularly the volunteers, who play a massive part in our vaccination roll-out programme. I fully support the NHS cadet scheme—part of our work to establish a volunteering legacy for young people following the pandemic.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Mòran taing, Mr Speaker. May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition about Dame Cheryl Gillan and Shirley Williams?

The Scottish Government have passed landmark legislation embedding the UN convention on the rights of the child into Scots law, a real revolution in children's rights. Every party in the Scottish Parliament supported it, even the Scots Tories; it has been welcomed everywhere except here in Westminster. Instead of supporting this new law, the UK Government are, shamefully, taking the Scottish Parliament to court in order to strike it down. Apparently, the only basis of the UK Government's legal case is that the law constrains Westminster powers. So, Prime Minister, can you do everyone a favour by explaining how protecting children's rights in Scotland threatens the Tory Government in London?

The Prime Minister: This is complete nonsense. The Government of the United Kingdom ratified the UN convention on the rights of the child 30 years ago. We all supported it. This is nothing to do with the rights of vulnerable children, which we all protect; this is simply an attempt by the SNP to stir up constitutional chaos and create another fictitious bone of contention between themselves and the rest of the country. If they really cared about the rights of the child, they would do much more to improve education in Scotland, where they are so lamentably failing.

Ian Blackford: The rights of the child—this is an Act passed by the Scottish Parliament and supported by every party, and yet the Prime Minister's Government are taking our Parliament—our Government—to court. There is nothing technical about this, and the Westminster Government want to strip away the rights of children in Scotland. This is a tale of two Governments: we have an SNP Scottish Government delivering the baby box, doubling the Scottish child payment and providing free school meals to every primary school child; at the same time, this Tory Government are robbing children of their rights in Scotland. Quite simply, the SNP Scottish Government have worked, and will continue to work, to ensure that Scotland is the best place for a child to grow up. This legal challenge threatens that; it is wrong and it is morally repugnant, Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister commit to withdrawing his legal challenge today? If not, we will see you in court.

The Prime Minister: The best thing the SNP can do, as I have said, for the rights of the child in Scotland is to improve their shameful record on education and to tackle the issues that matter to the people of Scotland: to tackle the tax regime they have put in place; and to do better on fighting crime and drug addiction in Scotland. They should be looking at the issues that really matter to the people of Scotland, but instead they are going into the elections next month yet again on a campaign to break up this country. That is all they can think of: break up this country—destroy our country—and call a referendum, in a way that I think is completely irresponsible at a very difficult time when we want to bounce back stronger together.

[914252] **Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): The A55 expressway is of huge importance to north Wales, linking the region to the main motorway network. It is also, as was noted in the recent interim report on the Union connectivity review, the principal freight artery for the port of Holyhead. The road is in desperate need of improvement, and has been for many years, so will

my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will make it a priority to use their powers under the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 to upgrade the road for the benefit of the people of north Wales?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is completely right. Sir Peter Hendy has rightly identified the potential of the A55, and the best thing the people of Wales can do to guarantee these vital upgrades is elect a Welsh Conservative Government on 6 May.

Mr Speaker: We now go to Vicky Foxcroft. Vicky, I understand you are going to sign; can you speak and sign at the same time for the benefit of all?

[914250] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): [*In British Sign Language*] Why is there no interpreter in the room for briefings?

If the Prime Minister did not understand that, imagine how those who rely on British Sign Language feel at his press briefings. Some £2.6 million was spent on the new press room, yet there is still no interpreter; what message does he think this sends to disabled people?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and grateful for the way she has set out her question. I will revert to her as soon as I can.

[914253] **Miss Sarah Dines** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is thanks to the sacrifice of the British people during lockdown and the great success of the vaccination programme that lots of small businesses across the whole country and in my constituency of Derbyshire Dales, such as Brocklehursts, which supplied clothing to Prince Philip, can remain open? Will my right hon. Friend join me in a campaign to shop local as we come out of lockdown?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. Yes, I certainly will encourage her and everybody else to shop local as we come out of lockdown, as I very much hope that we will be able to do. My right hon. Friend the Communities Secretary has announced that £830 million of funding from the future high streets fund has been allocated to areas, including my hon. Friend's, to encourage that shopping that we all hope and want to see.

[914255] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab) [V]: May I extend my condolences and those of my constituents to the Queen and the royal family for their sad loss, and to the families and colleagues of Cheryl Gillan and Shirley Williams? Will the Prime Minister tell the House when he last spoke to former Prime Minister David Cameron?

The Prime Minister: The honest truth—I cannot remember when I last spoke to Dave, but if the hon. Lady wants to know whether I have had any contact with him about any of the matters that have been in the press, the answer is no.

[914254] **Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): Those who helped to develop, test, approve and manufacture the vaccines deserve our praise. Will my right hon. Friend also recognise that the successful roll-out of the vaccination programme has been based

on the dedication of the NHS staff and the myriad volunteers who have made the process so easy for so many people?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is completely right. This has been a colossal team effort. It has been led by the NHS, with GPs very often doing the lion's share of the work, but they have been supported by the Army, by local council officials, who have also been absolutely magnificent, and, as colleagues have said, by volunteers as well.

[914257] **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): The interim findings of Sir Peter Hendy's Union connectivity review are very much to be welcomed. He highlights the improvements that need to be made to the railways in north Wales, linking up with Merseyside and Manchester, as well as the A55. Those improvements, of course, can help to level up the region. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the projects in north Wales identified in Sir Peter Hendy's work will receive a fair chunk of the £20 million of development funding as part of the agenda, and will he commit to implementing the findings of Sir Peter Hendy's final report when it is released in the summer?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. We will look at what Sir Peter has to say. He has come up with some very interesting interim proposals, particularly about improving connectivity along the north Wales coastline—the routes into Merseyside. On the A55, I repeat what I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones): there is a great opportunity to do that if people will vote Conservative and vote for a Welsh Conservative Government on 6 May.

[914260] **Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC) [V]: In 2007, my friend Adam Price, then the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, proposed the Elected Representatives (Prohibition of Deception) Bill. At this distance in time, it would be unkind to quiz the Prime Minister on the detail, but he is seen as a big thinker, so perhaps he could tell the House what he thinks of the principle of that Bill, which is that on important matters of public policy, politicians must not lie.

The Prime Minister: I have a high regard for the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, remember happy times with his colleague Adam Price. I do not remember the details of his Bill, but I think we would all concur with the basic principle that the hon. Gentleman has just enunciated.

[914258] **Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): Former police inspector Kash Singh set up One Britain One Nation, otherwise known as OBON, to bring together all communities, all classes, all ethnicities, races and religions to celebrate being British. OBON Day is held in June. However, next week, on 22 April, will be the launch at a school in Bradford. Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating Kash Singh on his fantastic initiative for all communities to come together in a common pride of being British? Will he also make a message for the launch next week?

The Prime Minister: Well, I'll do my best. I fully support what my right hon. Friend is doing and I congratulate Kash Singh on his work. It is incredible at this time that there are people who want to split our country up, rather than bring us together. That is what

the SNP want. It is an absolute tragedy that they still think like that. I think they are going to change, but I wish everybody at OBON all the very best.

[914262] **Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): Contrary to the conclusions of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report, institutional racism still exists. Forty years since the Liverpool 8 uprisings, black communities continue to suffer racial injustice and the report downplays the structural inequalities that still exist. The Resolution Foundation announced today that the unemployment rate for young black people rose by 35%, compared with 13% for their white counterparts. Can the Prime Minister confirm the allegations that Downing Street redrafted the report to change the narrative? Does he agree that the report should now be withdrawn?

The Prime Minister: Of course, when we look at and read the report in detail, the Government are not going to agree with everything, but there are some interesting observations and some interesting ways of looking at things. We will be responding in due course, but what we say is that nobody should be in any doubt as to the reality of racism and the struggle that too many people face. We will do everything we can to stamp it out, particularly to help young black people get the jobs and the education they need.

[914259] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As my right hon. Friend will know, as we build back better we need to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. Will he therefore agree to work with EngineeringUK and Big Bang Digital to provide a short online introduction to this year's event to reinforce the message that a career in engineering is rewarding, creative and can transform the world around us for the better? Will he recognise the extraordinary contribution that engineers have made and are making in our battle against covid?

The Prime Minister: Engineers and scientists of all kinds have been crucial in the fight against covid, and this is the moment to become an engineer or work towards being an engineer. We are putting a huge £640 billion investment into the infrastructure of this country over the next few years. We will need skilled young people to go into engineering, and that is why we put in the T-levels. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his initiative, and I will do my best to support him.

[914263] **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Given his ancestry, the Prime Minister will be more than familiar with the phrase "a fish rots from the head down"—it is a Turkish proverb. Put simply, since he became the Prime Minister the sound of Big Ben's bongs has been replaced by the cash till sound of big donor bungs. There has been a threefold increase in bungs from property developers. Last summer, we had the case of Richard Desmond and the Communities Secretary. More recently, we have had Ministers dishing the dosh between constituencies, and the Health Secretary handing—or involved in—a contract with his pub landlord for £30 million-worth of PPE. Now, we have a Chancellor and Health Secretary who have sought to grease the wheels of involvement with Greensill and David Cameron. What does this say about the Prime Minister's leadership of his Government?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is simply wrong in what he says, particularly about my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Health Secretary; I do not believe that he should have spoken in those terms. What I will say is that there is one party in this place that brought in tough rules on lobbying, and another party that campaigned at the last election to get rid of those rules because of its relationship with the trade unions, because it wanted them to continue in the obscure, opaque way in which they were being run, and because it wanted people to be able to continue to lobby parliamentarians in the way that they always did. Look at the Labour manifesto from 2019. If the Leader of the Opposition repudiates it now, why does he not go ahead and do so?

[914261] **Gareth Davies** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con) [V]: In the past few months, a number of my constituents have taken to the streets to help tackle the problem of littering; I pay particular tribute to constituents in Colsterworth whom I met recently. Will the Prime Minister join me in backing the *Grantham Journal's* spring clean campaign? Can he assure my constituents that the Government are doing all they can to tackle littering?

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's indignation about litter. I think that it is one of the things on which the whole of the country and, I hope, the whole of the House are united. That is why we are doing the Respect the Outdoors campaign to encourage people to follow the countryside code and pick up their litter. Obviously a lot of people are meeting outdoors at the moment because of the pandemic; they must obey the basic laws of respect for other people—pick up their litter. We are putting money into new litter bins and, yes, we are increasing on-the-spot fines for littering. I know there will be many libertarians in this place who think that is unfair and draconian. Personally, I think it is the right thing to do. I abhor litter, and I urge anybody who sees anybody throwing away a crisp packet to tick them off and tell them to pick it up.

Mr Speaker: I suspend the House for a few minutes to enable the necessary arrangements to be made for the next business.

12.31 pm

Sitting suspended.

NHS Pay Award (Report)

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

12.35 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament a report on any proposal to award NHS staff a pay rise for 2021/22 below 2.1%; to require the Secretary of State to move a motion in the House of Commons to approve any such report; and for connected purposes.

The last 13 months have impacted all of our lives, through illness, bereavement and financial worries, on top of learning to live with the fear of the pandemic and the limits on our freedoms. We have not all faced the same level of difficulties, but none of us have escaped without our lives in some way being changed by the experience. Some 127,000 people have tragically lost their lives—this is one of the highest death tolls in Europe—and in the past year more than 450,000 have been hospitalised due to severe covid symptoms.

For every one of those people, it has been our amazing NHS frontline staff who have cared for them, fought for them and either celebrated their recovery or held their hand as they took their last breath. Our NHS staff have kept this country going, risking their own health, isolating from their own families, working harder than ever, grieving the lives they could not save and comforting the bereaved. They are the very best of Britain and they deserve to be given the credit and the reward for everything that they have done and everything they have sacrificed to keep the rest of us safe.

Nurses and NHS staff were promised at least a 2.1% pay rise, but the Government have now retracted that and recommended 1% for all NHS staff, with the exception of junior doctors, GPs and dentists. The Government pretend that this is a rise, but they are fooling no one. With inflation forecast to reach 1.7% this year, our NHS staff, who have shown nothing but commitment this last year, are now set to receive a real-terms pay cut. Nurses' pay has been falling in real terms since the Conservatives came to power 11 years ago, with pay awards consistently lagging behind inflation. Already that is unacceptable, but in the current situation the Government's proposal to reduce that even further shows a complete lack of respect and gratitude.

For me, the thought of looking a nurse in the eye and telling them that they are worth less this year than they were before the pandemic is outrageously insulting. All of us across this House stood on our doorsteps and clapped for our key workers. We all took to social media to thank NHS staff and tell them what a wonderful job they were doing. We would have all been indebted to them if we had got sick and needed hospital care to help us against this indiscriminating virus, as some on these Benches indeed did. So was this just for show? Were the warm words and platitudes just a tick-box exercise? Or do the Prime Minister and his Government, hand on heart, truly believe that a rule-breaking, unapologetic aide is worth considerably more than the hundreds of thousands of NHS staff who have worked tirelessly and selflessly to battle this viral enemy and save lives?

The promise was clear: a 2.1% increase, as a minimum—it was not dependent on inflation rates or any other economic struggles. That promise has been broken, in

yet another ill-judged U-turn by the Government. If the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues have now rescinded that offer and replaced it with an inferior one, they need to come to this House with the revised recommendation and put it to a vote. When Opposition Members clapped on a Thursday evening and pledged our support to the NHS heroes, we meant it, and we still mean it. Those NHS staff have held up their side of the bargain, working diligently and doing everything in their power to save lives. Now it is our turn to hold up our side by voting in favour of a fair, long-term pay deal that reflects their commitment.

A recent survey by the Royal College of Nursing concluded that more than a third of the 42,000 people who submitted responses were considering leaving the NHS because they felt undervalued. These are staff who are exhausted from their efforts over the last year—they have worked unpaid overtime, forfeited their mental wellbeing and, far too often, put our families ahead of their own. The least they expected in return was recognition and fairness, but when it comes to a Government who have consistently failed to deliver on both, it appears that they were expecting too much.

We are on a cliff edge here: we already know that we entered the pandemic with a record 100,000 vacancies across the NHS. If we do not pay the staff what they deserve, we will struggle to retain those we have—let alone fill any vacancies. Even the 2.1% in the long-term plan was a minimum, and a cautious one at that, but 1% is not a pay rise—it is an insult. Trade unions and professional bodies are calling for improved pay offers at varying levels. They know that a fair pay rise would also help to boost staff recruitment and retention.

A 1% pay rise for an experienced nurse equates to £3.50 a week. That is £3.50 for a year of unpaid overtime, unwavering commitment and personal sacrifice—£3.50 for a year of turmoil; of fighting a virus that at times seemed unbeatable; of watching patients die, despite doing everything possible to save them; and of having to keep on going when beyond exhausted.

On the Opposition side of the House, we believe that our NHS is worth so much more. Under this Bill, the Government will be required to present their recommendations for anything below the already approved minimum increase of 2.1%, and to seek agreement from the House on any new proposals. That is the least that our NHS deserves. Our NHS staff have not faltered since the start of the pandemic, and they deserve to be rewarded for that. Unions and stakeholders know it, the public know it and we on this side of the House know it.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23).

The House divided: Ayes 222, Noes 0.

Division No. 249]

[12.42 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Begum, Apsana
Abrahams, Debbie	Benn, rh Hilary
Ali, Rushanara	Betts, Mr Clive
Ali, Tahir	Blake, Olivia
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Blomfield, Paul
Amesbury, Mike	Brabin, Tracy
Anderson, Fleur	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Brennan, Kevin
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Brown, Ms Lyn
Barker, Paula	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Beckett, rh Margaret	Bryant, Chris

Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glindon, Mary
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia

Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh 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
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian

Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra

Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 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
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Gill Furniss

NOES

Tellers for the Noes:
Mark Tami and

Jessica Morden

Question accordingly agreed to.

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

Ordered,

That Carolyn Harris, Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner, Jonathan Ashworth, Dr Rosena Allin-Khan, Mr Nicholas Brown, Liz Kendall, Justin Madders, Alex Norris, Jim Shannon and Jamie Stone present the Bill.

Carolyn Harris accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 284).

Opposition Day

[19TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Lobbying of Government Committee

12.53 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That the following Standing Order shall have effect until 31 December 2021:

Investigation into the Lobbying of Government Committee

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Investigation into Lobbying of Government Committee, to consider:

(a) the effectiveness of existing legislation to prevent the inappropriate lobbying of Ministers and Government;

(b) the rules governing all public officials regarding conflicts of interest;

(c) the circumstances surrounding the appointment of Lex Greensill as an adviser in Government and the process by which Greensill Capital was approved for commercial arrangements with Government departments and other public sector bodies; and

(d) the role Government played in facilitating the commercial relationship between Greensill Capital and the Gupta Family Group Alliance.

(2) It shall be an instruction to the Committee that it:

(a) considers whether there are robust transparency and accountability procedures in place and whether existing rules are being adhered to;

(b) considers whether the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments' regulatory framework and sanctioning powers are sufficient to enforce its advice;

(c) assesses the extent of undue influence that former politicians and advisers have on the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies; and

(d) that it makes a first Report to the House no later than 18th October 2021.

(3) The committee shall consist of 16 members of whom 15 shall nominated by the Committee of Selection in the same manner as those Select Committees appointed in accordance with Standing Order No. 121.

(4) The Chair of the committee shall be a backbench Member of a party represented in Her Majesty's Government and shall be elected by the House under arrangements approved by Mr Speaker.

(5) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it until the expiration of this Order.

(6) The committee shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time; and

(b) to appoint specialist advisers to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(7) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(8) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the evidence taken before the sub-committee.

Mr Speaker,

“The lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear, the ex-ministers and ex-advisers for hire, helping big business find the right way to get its way.”

That is how former Prime Minister David Cameron described the next big scandal to hit British politics, back in 2010. We might think that what David Cameron lacks in transparency he makes up for in fortune telling, except that he had inside information because the person exploiting the loopholes would be the very same David Cameron.

We had a Conservative Prime Minister giving Lex Greensill access to all areas of Government. He was brought in and given privileged access to the heart of Government with the title and the business card of a senior adviser in the Prime Minister's office. Then—what a stroke of luck—when he was no longer Prime Minister, and just past the required period, when he no longer needed the approval of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, David Cameron joined Greensill to lobby the Conservative Government full of his friends.

Having refused to respond to any questions at all for 40 days, David Cameron chose a period of national grief, hoping that there would be less political criticism and less scrutiny. It is cynical and it is shabby, and the statement itself was toe-curling. He is not sorry for his conduct, for the texts and the drinks, but he is sorry he got caught and he is sorry that his shares are now worthless. This is not just a question of why he did not go through the correct channels; it is question of why he was doing this at all.

Let us be really clear: David Cameron was not working in the national interest; he was working in his own personal interest, with the hope of making millions of pounds for himself through the exercise of his share options. But questions cannot just be asked of David Cameron, when it is current Conservative Ministers who have paved the way for this scandal. When it comes to lobbying, it takes two to tango. For every former Minister lobbying, there is someone in power being lobbied. That is why this scandal is not just about the conduct of David Cameron during his time as Prime Minister and in the years afterwards. This is about who he lobbied in the current Government and how they responded.

Lex Greensill was awarded a CBE and was made a Crown representative by a Conservative Government, yet his company's spectacular collapse now means that over 50,000 jobs are at risk around the world, including thousands in the UK's steel communities, from Hartlepool to Stocksbridge, from Rotherham to Scunthorpe and to Newport. The steel industry is crucial and the Government must make it clear that our steel industry will not pay the price for the failures at Greensill and beyond.

This Government have set up an inquiry, but just about supply chain finance and Greensill. Such a review is wholly inadequate, and deliberately so. They do not want to explore what needs to change in lobbying or who currently gets access to power, or the wider issue of how to lift standards, which have fallen so far in the 10 years of Conservative Governments. They do not want public hearings. They do not want the disinfectant of sunlight, as David Cameron once urged. They just want this to go away, which is why they have chosen Nigel Boardman to chair the inquiry.

It is a fact that Nigel Boardman is a good friend—a very good friend—of the Conservative Government. Some may suspect that the son of a former Conservative Cabinet Minister might be unlikely to make waves, but let us look at his record. Mr Boardman has been paid over £20,000 per year as a non-executive director at the

[Rachel Reeves]

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—a Department with a real interest in the British Business Bank, which lent to Greensill, and the British steel industry, where so many jobs are now at risk. Mr Boardman has already whitewashed the Government’s handling of public procurement during the pandemic and I fear that he will do the same again with this inquiry.

You will remember, Mr Speaker, that I jointly chaired the inquiry into the collapse of Carillion. The fact that Mr Boardman’s law firm made £8 million advising Carillion, including £1 million on the day before the outsourcers collapsed, leaves a terrible taste in my mouth as it should in the mouths of Members on the Government Benches. To cap it all, Mr Boardman was appointed to a prestigious role at the British Museum by—oh, by David Cameron! What is being proposed by the Government is not remotely fit for purpose. It is not an inquiry. It is not independent. It is an insult to us all.

The scope of this inquiry has to be bigger than supply chain financing. It has to be about lobbying, too, and bigger than what rules were broken. If the existing lobbying rules were not breached, that is a big part of the problem, surely. Had the Conservatives backed Labour’s amendments to the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill back in 2014, there would have been much more transparency, but they did not. David Cameron and his Government voted them down, and boy are they exploiting them now! We need public service in the national interest, not people viewing the state like some get-rich-quick scheme, with taxpayers treated as collateral damage.

We now learn that the Conservatives are joined in all this by the SNP, whose Rural Economy Secretary in the Scottish Government dined with Lex Greensill in one of Glasgow’s finest restaurants with no officials, no notes, no emails, no texts and no phone records about the meeting. Here in Westminster, we have witnessed the degrading of the ministerial code.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): We have absolutely no quibble with what the shadow Minister has been saying, but is she trying to draw an equivalence between what David Cameron did and what Fergus Ewing did in a meeting that was recorded and has been publicly available for a long time on the Scottish Government’s website? There was nothing untoward in what Fergus Ewing did, and in trying to conflate the two, the hon. Lady does a great disservice to herself and her argument.

Rachel Reeves: Well, the Scottish people can be the judge of that. If the hon. Member thinks that a Scottish Minister dining with Lex Greensill is okay, his party should put that on its leaflets in the elections in May.

Sir Alex Allan resigned as independent adviser on ministerial interests following the Prime Minister’s failure to take action on the Home Secretary’s bullying behaviour. That was five months ago. The Government have not replaced him. They have not even advertised the job. What does that say about how seriously this Government take standards?

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I just point out that, when Gordon Brown appointed his Prime Minister’s adviser on ministerial interests,

that job was not advertised either because it is not advertised; it is a prime ministerial appointment. The motion proposes to set up a new Select Committee when there are many existing Select Committees. I am Chairman of the Liaison Committee. Why has the hon. Member not consulted any of us about this manoeuvre? I appreciate what Oppositions do, which is to try to embarrass the Government, but she is right that there are much wider issues to address. Should we not try to address those issues in a bipartisan manner?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The point about Sir Alex Allan is that it is five months later and nobody has been appointed to this role. Whether we advertise the role or not, it has been vacant for five months. [Interruption.] A Member says from a sedentary position that it will happen shortly, but five months is an awfully long time.

I will come on to the issue of the composition of the Select Committee, but like the hon. Gentleman, I had the privilege of chairing a Select Committee. When scandals happened, we looked into them, as we did with the collapse of Carillion, and I know that the hon. Gentleman did so too. The problem is that there is no overarching inquiry planned into not just what happened with Greensill but more widely around lobbying, cronyism and sleaze. I am very happy to work on a cross-party basis to take this forward, and I welcome the comments from the hon. Gentleman over the last couple of days.

As well as the lack of an adviser on ministerial interests, there has been an absence of ministerial interests being published. They are supposed to be published twice a year, but they were published only once last year, in July, and not at all since then. These things matter—they are the foundations on which the standards of government rest, and under this Government, those foundations are being consciously removed. That is why this motion does what the Government should have done but chose not to: it gives the power to this House, not the Government, with a 16-strong Select Committee with clout to investigate this whole sorry scandal. It would have powers to call witnesses and examine them in public, like an effective Select Committee would. The investigation that we propose would look at inappropriate lobbying of Government and what needs to be done to prevent it. It would have the powers needed to demand witnesses and communications. It would examine the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments and whether it has sufficient powers, resources and the right remit. Put simply, this special new Select Committee would aim to tackle the problem staring us in the face, not cover it up.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I note the motion and thank the hon. Member for it. I just wondered why she thought it was appropriate that the membership of that Committee be nominated by the Committee of Selection? Why should it be filled with a load of Whips’ stooges?

Rachel Reeves: I will not comment on how Select Committee Chairs are sometimes elected in this place. But as a former Select Committee Chair, I know how seriously colleagues around this House would take this responsibility, as the hon. Gentleman does. We are prepared to make a concession to Conservative Members.

We will accept that this Committee can be chaired by a Back Bencher from the governing party as long as there is cross-party representation on the Committee, as with other Select Committees.

The Conservative party is at a fork in the road. If MPs vote for this motion, a proper investigation can take place, led by a team with the confidence of this House, not someone handpicked from the board of one of the Government Departments embroiled in this scandal. But if they vote against it, as the Prime Minister has told them all to do, I am sorry to say that they too will be part of the Government's attempt to cover up Tory sleaze. All Members here today should reflect on who they are here to serve: their constituents and their country, or their narrow party interests?

The stakes are high for our democracy and our public life. It was a past Conservative Government—embroiled in sleaze in the 1990s—who eventually recognised the need for standards to rise and to create the Nolan principles. The Nolan principles of public life have to live and breathe through all those in public office serving our great country. Yesterday we learned that the Government's former head of procurement was an adviser for Greensill while still a civil servant. Incredibly, that was approved. The defence is that it was “not uncommon”. What on earth was happening at the Cabinet Office and at the heart of Government to allow these conflicts of interest to fester? Sir John Major, who witnessed the cash for questions scandal and other Tory sleaze in the '90s when he was Prime Minister also believes that the rules need to be changed again.

One of the Nolan principles—as you well know, Mr Speaker—is leadership. With that in mind, where is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today? Where was the Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday? What have they got to hide? There is a wider pattern of behaviour with the Conservatives here, in the present as well as in the recent past: a Conservative Government who are more interested in private drinks with the owners of private jets than meeting the families bereaved by covid; a Government who gave a 40% pay rise to Dominic Cummings, but a pay cut to nurses; Tory politicians thinking that it is one rule for them and another for everybody else; personal attention lavished on friends of Cameron, while 3 million people are excluded from Government financial support and cannot even get a meeting with the Treasury.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con) *rose*—

Rachel Reeves: If the hon. Member wants to defend all that—be my guest.

Craig Williams: On the subject of leadership, the hon. Lady has touched on the Scottish Government. But the Welsh Government have of course been in place for 22 years and there is still no lobbying register, and the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments has recently taken the former Labour First Minister to task over an appointment to GFG. On leadership, may I draw the hon. Lady on those points?

Rachel Reeves: As far as I am aware, the First Minister of Wales has not appointed a financier as his adviser, nor does he have £30 million-worth of share options that he might fancy exercising. The hon. Gentleman has today abstained in a vote to give nurses a pay rise—put that on your election leaflet at the next general election.

Some £2 billion of public contracts in the last year have gone to friends and donors of the Conservative party, which has been rolling out the red carpet with a VIP fast lane for contracts. Supposedly independent reports have been rewritten by Downing Street. There are undeclared details on who has paid what for a luxury refurbishment of the No. 10 Downing Street flat. Relationships are undisclosed, and there are increasingly frequent breaches and casual disregard of the ministerial code.

Some have asked this week, quite powerfully, “When did we stop caring about honesty and integrity?” That is what this motion is about. What happens in the vote will say so much about our great country, but also about our current Government. That is why I urge all hon. and right hon. Members to do the right thing and back this motion today. Vote for a proper investigation to close the loopholes, to rein in the lobbyists and to lift standards in this great democracy in which we all have the privilege to serve.

1.10 pm

The Minister for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith) [V]: I welcome the chance to contribute to this Opposition day debate. I am sure that you will appreciate, Mr Speaker, that it is appropriate and possible to do so virtually.

First, may I add my own tribute to those made earlier this week to His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, whose commitment to the service of this country and to the highest possible standards of conduct was exemplary?

During the extraordinary challenge of covid-19, the Government have worked with people and businesses of all sorts—from private citizens to key workers, from our brilliant small and medium-sized enterprises to multinationals. In that monumental effort to protect the public and save lives across the country, civil servants across Government, working under incredible pressure, have achieved extraordinary things.

Even away from times of crisis, this country can be proud of the standards that we uphold. In Transparency International's 2020 index, which ranks countries, the United Kingdom was ranked above close European neighbours such as France and Ireland in 11th place. We are the first G20 country to establish a public register of domestic company beneficial ownership and the first G7 country to undergo an IMF fiscal transparency evaluation.

This Government value such reputation and will always uphold it. As hon. Members heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister say just now, we are concerned about some of what has emerged in recent weeks. Most of what this complex motion proposes is already being done. Indeed, as the policy Minister responsible, it is perfectly sensible for me to respond today on behalf of my Department. The hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) has shadowed me before—10 years ago—and it is good to see her again today in her place.

The motion seeks to establish in Standing Orders a Select Committee with a remit so wide-ranging as to cut across Parliament's existing Committees and independent bodies that have responsibilities in this area. Let us take the elements part by part. Looking at the effectiveness of existing legislation on lobbying, the Government are already doing this and I shall explain more in a second. On the Greensill affair, an independent review was

[Chloe Smith]

announced this week, before this motion was laid, and will be effected. On transparency measures and the ACOBA framework, the Cabinet Office is already working to strengthen the former and supporting the reforms of my noble Friend Lord Pickles to bolster the latter. We are opposing the motion today because it seeks to duplicate the work that is already in the gift of Parliament and its Committees and, as I will set out now, work that is already being undertaken by the Government.

Starting with the effectiveness of existing lobbying legislation, we are currently conducting post-legislative scrutiny of part 1 of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014, which we all know as the lobbying Act. It is looking precisely at the scope and effectiveness of that legislation. The hon. Lady did not mention that—not one whit. That legislation introduced a new statutory register of consultant lobbyists and a requirement that those undertaking paid lobbying on behalf of any third party must register and make clear who they are representing to Ministers and permanent secretaries.

The requirement for consultant lobbyists to declare that work complements the system of self-regulation that lobbyists also adhere to through professional codes of conduct. It makes transparent otherwise hidden lobbying. It remains an important part of the framework, filling an accountability and transparency gap that existed prior to that point. We think that it operates effectively but, as I have said, we are looking at whether further improvements can be made, as is best practice through post-legislative scrutiny. Once that work is complete, we intend to deliver a memorandum to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee for further scrutiny. Would it really be constructive for these workstreams to be undertaken in parallel by separate Committees, potentially cutting across one another, sowing confusion? We think that it would not.

While the creation of Select Committees is of course a matter for the House, there are already relevant Committees in Parliament with the powers and capacity to do such work as is proposed. I note that the Chair, and indeed the prior Chair, of PACAC have already spoken today. That Committee is responsible for the examination of the quality and standards of administration across the Government. In this Parliament, it has already undertaken relevant inquiries. Indeed, it has also called the chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life to give evidence. It has the powers to send for persons, papers and records, and to report to the House—the powers proposed for the new Committee—so I question the necessity of an additional Committee. Indeed, that additional proposed Committee would also cost a quarter of a million pounds.

Her Majesty's Government has a full framework in place to ensure that public money is spent efficiently, and that those who serve as stewards of those public resources act in accordance with the highest standards and in the public interest. The use of public money is overseen by the Treasury and, of course, Parliament, and the use of public position and information is overseen by the Cabinet Office and rightly held to account by Parliament and the public. Furthermore, all those who work across the public sector are expected to maintain the ethical standards embodied in the seven principles

of public life, which underpin the respective codes for Ministers, for the civil service and for special advisors, as well as the code of conduct for board members of public bodies. That requirement to act with integrity means that public office holders must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work, and all holders of public office must declare and resolve any interests.

We are not complacent, neither about the scale of this challenge nor about taking action where necessary to uphold the public's faith in what we should all stand for. Since 2010, under the coalition and then under Conservative Governments, we have significantly increased transparency on the workings of Government—which the public should rightly be able to expect—from publishing contracts and details of spending, salaries, tenders and meetings to launching that statutory register of consultant lobbyists, far more than ever published under the last Labour Government. This Government have banned the once-endemic practice of Government quangos hiring lobbyists to lobby the Government. They have ensured that taxpayer-funded Government grants are not then used to lobby the Government themselves. They have introduced greater transparency of trade unions and campaign finance controls on third parties seeking to lobby in our elections, so when the Government are being held to account—as is right—it is because a tougher regime of transparency has been in place for over a decade, and is now the norm.

We are going further still to uphold the covenant of trust with the public. I have already touched on the Government's review of lobbying legislation. In addition, we are reviewing and improving business appointment rules, which I will return to in a moment or two. However, as the hon. Member for Leeds West dwelt upon at some length, the Cabinet Office this week has announced a review on behalf of the Prime Minister into the role in Government of Greensill Capital, the finance company that went into administration last month. The review will look at the development and use of supply chain finance associated activities in Government, and specifically the role of Greensill, including how contracts were secured and business representatives engaged with Government.

The review will be wide-ranging, and will also consider the issues raised by my noble Friend Lord Pickles regarding Mr Bill Crothers' role at Greensill Capital. The public can be assured that Mr Nigel Boardman, the senior lawyer leading the review, who will pause his activities as a non-executive director at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for the duration, will have full access to the people who were in government at the relevant time and who made the relevant decisions. I would add that the information that has already emerged in recent weeks about Greensill Capital has done so in some part because the system in place is doing its job, and ensuring support for transparency and accountability.

I will not go into great detail further about recent events, because that inquiry will do so, but two further things can be said now about lobbying policy. First, the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists conducted an investigation into Mr David Cameron's activities, and has confirmed that those did not require registration under the current legislative framework. For good reason,

these rules apply to consultant lobbyists, who may seek to influence policy making on behalf of a third party who would otherwise be hidden. Mr Cameron was working openly in-house as an employee. To complement this law, the meetings of Ministers and permanent secretaries with external organisations are published on a quarterly basis and are made available on gov.uk. That data describes both the purpose of the meeting and the names of the organisations or individuals who are met. That is very important. Regulation must of course balance the need for transparency by lobbyists while not preventing engagement by the voluntary and private sectors.

The second thing is to engage in the politics of today's Opposition day, although it is a great shame to do so in a period of national mourning. The hon. Member for Leeds West failed to say that Labour now wants to repeal the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014. This was in its manifesto, alongside repealing the Trade Union Act 2016. Who is not to say that the Labour party would simply give favours to the union barons who bankroll it? After the EU referendum, Labour MPs called for tighter controls on third-party campaigning, but their official policy is to rip up these lobbying laws. Indeed, in 2014, at the time of making that law, the Labour party supported amendments that would have placed significant barriers on engagement and required thousands of businesses, charities, non-governmental organisations and trade bodies to pay a registration fee of £1,000 a year to write or speak to Ministers. This could have been detrimental to the public interest during the covid pandemic, when groups across civil society rightly wanted to put their case to Government.

However, I agree with the hon. Lady that transparency and probity are fundamental. I would like to cover one more area on business appointment rules. As I have mentioned, the Cabinet Office is working with Lord Pickles, who is the chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments—ACOBA—to improve and extend the business appointment regime. That applies lobbying bans on former Ministers and civil servants, including special advisers. The business appointment rules seek to protect the integrity of the Government while allowing for people to move on to roles outside government. Although affording ACOBA statutory powers to enforce these rules would be out of line with the general principle of UK law that Ministers and officials are subject to the same legal system and statutory framework as everybody else, ACOBA is able to enforce a range of sanctions for non-compliance. That is very important. The Government support changes being introduced by ACOBA to improve the business appointment process. A framework with a risk-based consideration of cases aims to bring greater transparency and improve the reporting of any breach of the rules, increasing the moral and reputational pressure on those leaving public office. In addition, the Cabinet Office is leading work to improve the scope, clarity and enforcement of the rules, and how consistently and proportionately they are implemented across government. In short, we are taking action on a range of fronts to ensure that we maintain the highest standards in our politics and public life.

We should all condemn the kind of lobbying that gives politics and politicians a bad name in all parts of the House, but this motion does not achieve that. Instead, it sidetracks, proliferates and duplicates. I invite Labour

to settle its own view, find its own position, and agree with us that transparency and probity are vitally important. I urge all hon. and right hon. Members to join us in this work to continue to scrutinise these critically important matters through the work of existing Select Committees, through the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and through the inquiry that we have now set up—among other ongoing, unstinting efforts that are of course accountable to this House—and to vote against this unnecessary and unconstructive motion that achieves so little extra. It is incumbent on all politicians to act with integrity as elected Members, as Ministers when we hold such positions, and in accordance with the principles of public life. It is incumbent on all of us in this House to ensure that important issues are carefully and effectively scrutinised. I have explained today how the Government are playing their part in this, and I urge all hon. Members to vote against the motion.

1.23 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Mr Speaker,

"I believe that secret corporate lobbying... goes to the heart of why people are so fed up with politics. It arouses people's worst fears and suspicions about how our political system works, with money buying power, power fishing for money and a cosy club at the top making decisions in their own interest. It's an issue that... has tainted our politics for too long, an issue that exposes the far-too-cosy relationship between politics, government, business and money."

Wise words indeed, and I wish they were mine, but they are not. They were said by David Cameron in February 2010, just a few short months before he became Prime Minister. He became Prime Minister with a promise that:

"If we win the election, we will take a lead on this issue by making sure that ex-ministers are not allowed to use their contacts and knowledge—gained while being paid by the public to serve the public—for their own private gain."

Today, David Cameron, that self-styled great reformer, is up to his neck in the same cronyism, corruption and sleaze that he promised to call out, expose and eradicate while in opposition.

The hypocrisy is breathtaking, and not simply because nothing has changed. We now know that far from taking on the corrosive culture of the nod and a wink and the old boys' club favouritism, he actually took it into government. We now know that while David Cameron was Prime Minister, Lex Greensill himself became so embedded in Downing Street that by 2012, he even had an official No. 10 business card, describing himself as a "Senior Advisor".

Almost 10 years to the day after delivering those stirring words and making those great promises, we discover that David Cameron directly lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and senior Government officials, thereby securing 10 meetings in three months in an attempt to influence the UK Government's covid corporate financing facility. He did it to benefit Greensill Capital, where he was then working as an adviser and lobbyist for the same Lex Greensill and where he reportedly held share options worth millions of pounds.

I invite Members to compare and contrast that level of access to the Chancellor and the powers that be at the centre of Government with that given to the millions of people and businesses left without any UK Government support during the pandemic, and in particular the

[Brendan O'Hara]

group of the excluded—those 3 million self-employed people who have been left without a penny of Government support. What they would have given for just one of the opportunities that were afforded Mr Cameron, let alone the 10 that he got.

I wonder whether Mr Cameron recalled at any point while brokering those meetings his own hollow words of February 2010. He said:

“We all know how it works. The lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear, the ex-ministers and ex-advisers for hire, helping big business find the right way to get its way.”

Of course, now it transpires that the Greensill influence in Downing Street during the Cameron years went even further and deeper than we could ever have imagined, with the astonishing revelation that in 2015, one of Britain's most senior civil servants was given permission to work part-time as an adviser to the board of Greensill while still serving as the UK Government's head of procurement.

How is it possible that the Cabinet Office gave the green light for the former Government chief commercial officer at the Cabinet Office to become part of Greensill Capital in September 2015 while still working as a supposedly impartial civil servant? Who authorised such a move? Who approved this appointment? Who thought that that was okay? What questions did the people at the Cabinet Office operating the internal conflict of interest policy actually ask to reach the conclusion that it was perfectly all right for one of the UK's most senior civil servants to twin-track and work for a private finance company whose owner at that point was swanning about Downing Street, dishing out business cards describing himself as a special adviser to the Prime Minister? It beggars belief.

This is crony capitalism at its worst. It stinks. The closer we get to it, the more it reeks, and that is why we will be supporting a full independent and transparent investigation and why we will support this motion when the House divides this afternoon.

On its own, the Greensill scandal would be bad enough. Unfortunately it is far from being an isolated event. It is just the most recent example of the rampant cronyism that is at the heart and centre of this Government, who seem to be stumbling from one scandal to another as the details emerge of a network of those who have become fabulously wealthy during this pandemic not because of their skill or business acumen but because of their political connections. In November last year, the National Audit Office revealed that companies with political connections who wanted to supply the UK with personal protective equipment were directed to a high priority channel, where their bids were 10 times more likely to be successful than those from companies that did not have links to politicians and senior Government officials.

In and of itself, the existence of this high priority channel is quite remarkable, but it becomes far more sinister when we consider that the NAO also reported that there were no written rules for how this high priority channel should operate, meaning that the companies gaining political support had access to hundreds of millions of pounds of public funds, were not subject to the usual procurement rules and could bypass the essential paperwork that in normal times would be a prerequisite for safeguarding against the misuse of public funds.

No matter how we look at this, it is not a good look. I absolutely agree with Professor Liz David-Barrett of the University of Sussex when she said:

“It's not clear to me why MPs or peers should have any special expertise on whether a company is qualified to provide PPE.”

She is absolutely right. She went on to make the entirely reasonable point that those who can be described as being linked to politically exposed persons are usually treated as being higher risk and therefore deserving of more scrutiny rather than less.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): I asked a parliamentary question about the standards being applied to people and companies on this supposed fast-track list versus others, to check that the same due diligence standards were being applied to both sides and that there was a level playing field. The answer that I got was that they were and that in this respect the playing field was level, so would the hon. Gentleman care to reconsider his point that the same processes do not apply?

Brendan O'Hara: What I would love to happen is for the Committee, when it meets, to examine that in detail to find out exactly whether it is true. What is inescapable is that a company is 10 times more likely to receive a Government contract through a political contact. That deserves careful scrutiny and has to be smoked out to the nth degree.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): However we collectively as the body politic got into this situation, may I suggest that it is damaging public trust in elected representatives? The one good thing about this Committee, if it were seen to be put in place, would be that it could restore some of that trust and repair some of the damage to democracy in the UK.

Brendan O'Hara: The hon. Gentleman is right. I think we all know from our postbags that, regardless of which side of the House we are on in this debate, we are all tainted by this. Anything that can shine a light on this—admittedly where some might not want it to be shone—would be a very good thing, and I wholeheartedly support it.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Is there not another point here, which is that whatever inquiry needs to be done must have the proper powers? For instance, it needs to be able to guarantee that anybody who gives evidence can do so without fear of prosecution, so that if there is a whistle that needs to be blown, it can be blown. It also needs to have subpoena powers, so that people who do not want to give evidence could be forced to do so. So far as I can see, those powers could be provided only by a judge-led inquiry—maybe we should go down that route, but I think it is unnecessary—or by a parliamentary inquiry.

Brendan O'Hara: The short answer is yes, and that is something that I will come on to in a moment. That is why this is so important.

It is not just Members of this House who are questioning the corrosive culture of cronyism at the heart of this Government; it has been attracting some fairly high-profile international attention too. At the end of last year, *The New York Times* decided to investigate how the UK Government managed what it described as the greatest

spending spree in the post-war era. It concluded that of the 1,200 central Government contracts worth nearly \$22 billion,

“\$11 billion went to companies either run by friends and associates of politicians in the Conservative Party, or with no prior experience or a history of controversy.”

That is an incredible amount of money, and any hint that it has been spent at the behest of someone with close ties to Downing Street or for the benefit of companies that have political allies in Government is deeply worrying. It has to be examined—and examined fully, robustly and independently.

While people might understand and accept that things had to happen quickly in the circumstances, and perhaps that normal procurement rules were not sufficiently speedy, they will not accept that a Government have any right to rip up every rule, every standard, every safeguard and to start throwing about public money like a scramble at a wedding, particularly when it is their mates who are there waiting to pick it up.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Committee should perhaps look at other activities that this Government get up to? There are things such as the Brexit contracts—I recall that they gave a contract to a ferry company that had no ferries—and all the appointments to external bodies and regulators, which are further examples of cronyism. We need to look at this in the bigger mix as well.

Brendan O’Hara: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I am sure that will not have escaped those on the Treasury Bench.

The Government’s inquiry, led by Nigel Boardman, simply will not work. It cannot be seen to be independent, as we have heard, because of the baggage and the back story that he has. Mr Boardman may have carte blanche to ask whatever questions he likes to whomever he likes, but they will have carte blanche not to answer those questions. If that is the case, what is the point? I have no doubt that this scandal will rumble on, and when it does, we must have a mechanism that is robust enough to see it.

Back in 2010, in his now risible speech, Mr Cameron said:

“We can’t go on like this...it’s time we shone the light...on lobbying in our country and forced our politics to come clean about who is buying power and influence.”

I wish he had meant it back in 2010. We have to mean it now, and that is why we will be supporting this motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We have many speakers to get in in what is a fairly short debate, so I will impose a four-minute limit to start with—that will be on the clocks in the Chamber and on the screens of those participating virtually—but it will probably have to go down to three minutes fairly quickly.

I call the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, William Wragg.

1.37 pm

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): May I thank the Opposition for tabling a motion to establish a Committee, but gently point out to them that one already exists; namely, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which the House has given me the honour of chairing? I trust that the motion

before us is not a vote of no confidence in either me or, indeed, the very independent-minded membership of that Committee.

I can forgive that oversight—momentarily forgetting the existence of that Committee—because, in a week of national mourning, and even on the day of tributes to His late Royal Highness, I did not think it seemly to be prattling about television studios. Nor, for that matter, did I think it was at all seemly for Mr Cameron’s statement to be released at that time. But rest assured that the Committee is and will be giving these matters proper consideration.

Perhaps to labour the point made by the Leader of the Opposition at Prime Minister’s questions—no doubt it will fall similarly flat when I say it—I am more than happy to take up the role of the AC-12 of Whitehall, but the motion proposed this afternoon could be taken from the script of Sunday night’s episode. For the benefit of the tape, I have full confidence in the members of the Committee to discharge their duties and do not require a reorganisation.

The House will note the Committee’s public session tomorrow morning with Lord Pickles, who, as chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, will doubtless have a vital contribution to make in illuminating matters. We also intend to have the Cabinet Secretary before the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee within the next fortnight. I ask the House to be assured that we will pursue every possible line of inquiry with our witnesses and shall conduct ourselves without fear or favour.

Without prejudicing these inquiries, I will offer a reflection on the crux of the issue. I wonder whether the attention given to the former Prime Minister, Mr Cameron, is somewhat of a red herring; it is no doubt a tasteless, slapdash and unbecoming episode for any former Prime Minister, but is it the central issue? After all, what is the key attribute of a former Minister or senior official? Surely we are all institutionalised and deskilled by public life; what possibly qualifies a former Minister or senior official? Food for thought.

There are four key areas of questioning ahead. First, the collapse of Greensill Capital has highlighted the shortcomings of the ACOBA rules and their applications. Secondly, does ACOBA’s oversight end completely two years after a former Minister or official has left their post? Thirdly, a senior official appears to have moved from a civil service position to join Greensill without application to ACOBA; is a secondment a technicality or at least a breach of the spirit, or indeed an actual breach, of the rules? Fourthly, Mr Greensill appears to have been a special adviser at 10 Downing Street; as a Spad, he would have fallen within ACOBA’s remit, and if so did he comply with the business appointment rules?

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): The questions my hon. Friend is posing are accommodated within the rules, but what we are talking about here is behaviour, and does he agree that this is about principles, indeed the very Nolan principles, and if everybody involved in public service viewed them as a code of practice for life we could avoid a lot of this?

Mr Wragg: It is often the case that if an individual’s attitude and sense of public probity were such, there would be no need for rules, but I fear we are quite often at risk of falling short.

Sir Bernard Jenkin *rose*—

Mr Wragg: The Chair of the Liaison Committee is indicating that he wishes to intervene.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I rise briefly to make the point that the 2017 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee report into the ACOBA rules recommended changes to the ministerial code and the civil service so there would be proper conversations about these conflicts of interest as they arise, which do not take place in the current atmosphere.

Mr Wragg: My hon. Friend is entirely correct, and I believe the whole new Committee entirely endorses the latest, 2017, report of the previous Committee and would wish to see those recommendations taken forward.

Chris Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Wragg: Yes, but I am at risk of indulging the hon. Gentleman too much.

Chris Bryant: Of course, the Nolan principles are embodied in the code of conduct that affects all MPs, and all this does is raise the danger of bringing the whole of the House into disrepute, so I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman's Committee will work with mine, the Committee on Standards, as we are reviewing the code of conduct to make sure that it really does work for the modern era.

Mr Wragg: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

Hon. and right hon. Members should always be careful in using the privilege afforded to us in speaking in this House, but I find it odd that the leaked emails should be from the late Cabinet Secretary, which cannot be contextualised or challenged by a man who is dead. We must be mindful of scapegoating, especially when it appears too neat, but neither should we allow conspiracy theories to abound without challenge. In the debate that follows, difficult as it may be, I would ask my hon. and right hon. Friends not to unquestioningly defend the integrity of others if they have doubts or have been asked to do so. Whatever little or imperfect integrity we have ourselves—for we are all fallible—it is the only integrity we can seek to protect.

1.43 pm

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab) [V]: I do not intend to detain the House for very long, as I know that many of my colleagues want to speak in this very important debate, and for very good reason.

The revelations reported in the press these past weeks of private messages between the Chancellor and the former Prime Minister David Cameron, private drinks between Mr Greensill and the Health Secretary, and a private network of connections between favoured businesses and Government Ministers are an absolute disgrace and a scandal. Sadly, they are just the tip of the iceberg of the cronyism and sleaze that are rife in the Conservative party, which it has now allowed into the heart of our Government. Many small businesses in Hull have had to fight tooth and nail to access financial support during the pandemic, so it is insulting that corporations

that can afford a former Prime Minister on the payroll can have cosy fireside chats with those at the very top of Government.

My constituents in east Hull expect better. They expect, whatever party is in power, that the Government should be run on the principles of honesty, decency and commitment to public service—not government by WhatsApp and billions of pounds of public money dished out to the Tory party's friends and donors. That is why we cannot allow the Government to mark their own homework through a whitewash review whose findings we know before it has even begun. We need a full parliamentary inquiry to get to the bottom of this scandal—an inquiry with power and teeth that will give taxpayers and the many thousands of people whose livelihoods are at risk because of Greensill's collapse the explanations and the justice that they fully deserve. Those with nothing to hide would have nothing to fear.

Government Members need to think long and hard about which way to vote today. Will they vote to sweep all this under the carpet in the hope that things will just move on, or will they do the decent thing, put standards in public life in this country before their party's interest, and vote for transparency and fairness? I sincerely hope that we see some backbone from Government MPs when the Division bell rings.

1.47 pm

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): There is widespread consensus across the House that this is a very difficult moment that is causing great concern, but widespread disagreement about how to take things forward. I was greatly struck by a point made by the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg): what is being proposed is something his Committee already has the powers to do, and he stands ready to fill in any gaps that his Committee feels might be left as a result of the announcement of an inquiry which has just been made.

In the light of those two things, I see no reason to support the motion. However, because there is such an important underlying issue and there are such important and central questions about the future of our democracy, and the probity and legitimacy of our system, there are some important points that need to be made. I hope the Minister will address them.

Today, I have put on my website my submission to the inquiry of the Committee on Standards in Public Life; the committee will make it public in due course, so I am not pre-empting anything. My submission contains a series of proposals for how we should improve things around lobbying and much else. The Minister for the Constitution and Devolution said earlier that post-legislative scrutiny work, which I have contributed to, is already going on around the lobbying Act, but I will briefly share some things that I believe could usefully be done to improve that Act. It has many strengths and does an enormous number of important things tremendously well, but it is now seven years old and it is time to review it and move it on. There are three or four things we could usefully do, and should do in any case, quite apart from the current concerns over Greensill.

First, as we have heard from several Members, disclosure of whom Ministers meet and when is tremendously important as the foundation stone of transparency. Such

disclosures do not happen fast enough, they are not complete enough, and they are not mutually comprehensible, machine-readable and searchable enough. As a result, it is much, much too difficult to link up who Ministers have met, whom the lobbyists are working for and who is donating money to which political party. Those three things should be immediately understandable, immediately searchable and immediately identifiable in order for the system to work well—that is not the case at the moment. This is a sensible change and one we should introduce immediately.

The second thing we should do is capture more people in those disclosures. At the moment, they apply to Ministers, rightly, and to senior civil servants—permanent secretaries and the like. However, there are other people whose opinions matter and who will seek to be influenced by lobbyists no matter who is doing the lobbying. Such people include not only political advisers—Spads—but a slew of other civil servants below the rank of permanent secretary. Their meetings, and the topics, should all be disclosed in the same way.

People will have seen that it is proposed that everybody who is lobbying should be included on the register of consultant lobbyists, but that seems to be overkill, because if someone from Rolls-Royce comes to speak to a Minister, we all know on whose behalf they are lobbying—they are lobbying on behalf of Rolls-Royce. Simply putting them on the register of consultant lobbyists will not improve things, whereas disclosing what they talked about, why they talked about it and any conclusions that were reached would make a huge difference.

Equally, there should be disclosure in respect of foreign agents—people working on behalf of foreign powers who are not part of the diplomatic corps of that country.

My final point relates to the about-to-be-reappointed prime ministerial adviser on special interests. If they had the power to launch independent investigations as well, we would not need debates such as today's because they would have already opined.

1.51 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab) [V]: When David Cameron claimed in 2010 that cronyism was the “next big scandal waiting to happen”,

I am not sure any of us thought he was quite so committed to making sure his predictions would come so true, yet the Greensill scandal emits a horrid stench, and Mr Cameron and all others involved must be held accountable. It is only a drop in the ocean in what is a tidal wave of cronyism and corruption among the upper echelons of this Conservative Government. This is not just about “dodgy Dave”, as the former Member for Bolsover rightly dubbed him; it is about the cancer of cronyism that has spread through the top level of the Conservative Government, as can be seen from the Arcuri affair, the covid-19 contracts, and now the parasitic lobbying that includes a former Tory Prime Minister. I must say this is hardly a red herring.

Over the past year, there has been a tale of two pandemics in this country, one involving the elites, which have siphoned off billions of hard-earned taxpayers' money, and one involving the millions of others who have been shielding or working as key workers on the frontline of the pandemic, all to protect the health of this country, or who have lost their job. How did those elites get such a cosy seat at the table? Certainly not as a

result of hard work and sacrifice, such as that we have seen from those key workers. The destiny of those elites was written as they walked the halls of their public schools and elite social clubs, making murky connections that propelled them into snug lobbying jobs or even safe Tory seats.

Contrast that with the position of a constituent of mine attending an underfunded local school with huge class sizes and becoming a key worker, toiling each day for an honest wage to keep the country on its feet, only to see their taxes being spent on contracts given to dodgy companies, with no competitive tendering. The very people who have been hit hardest by the pandemic—those who are being put on furlough—are expected to work twice as hard, while the avaricious public school clique see the opportunity to multiply their wealth further.

Today, hundreds of British Gas workers will lose their jobs for standing against a cruel “fire and rehire” scheme imposed by their employers, who seek to lower their wages and to worsen terms and conditions in midst of the global crisis, while those with close ties to senior members of the Conservative Government can simply pick up the phone, call a “jobs for the boys” hotline and bag a million-pound contract, despite having no qualifications so to do.

There are, quite simply, two realities being played out here in modern Britain—one for the elite and one for the rest of us. To get through this pandemic, the people of the country have pulled together and made huge sacrifices to see each other through, yet this Government are not in it together with our constituents. They are more concerned with protecting their lobbying clients' financial interests than they are with the public health of this country. As a result, they—to put it bluntly—have a lot to answer for.

I support the motion because it is all about transparency. It is about probity, accountability, clarity, honesty, decency, integrity, fairness and equality. There are two sides to this country, and everyone must simply ask themselves, whose side are you on?

1.55 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind) [V]: Politics and big money are never happy bedfellows. The first question any politician should ask if they are offered financial incentives or hospitality is, what do the providers want in return?

Legislation in this field has always failed to make any meaningful impact on political corruption. The most recent attempt—the 2014 transparency of lobbying Bill, during the premiership of David Cameron—attempted to provide a narrative of propriety to decontaminate the Tory brand, but in reality, he had a hidden agenda, which was to neuter the trade union movement. I pointed out at the time that those measures would not have dealt with any of the great Westminster corruption scandals of recent decades—donations for dinners, cash for honours, cash for questions, and the ministerial cab for hire of the last Labour Government.

Half a decade on, Mr Cameron is himself embroiled in the latest great Westminster corruption scandal. These revelations raise all sorts of questions, yet again, about the incestuous and damaging relationship between big money and Westminster politics. I give a guarded welcome to the British Government's decision to launch an inquiry on this case, but I fear the Prime Minister's true intentions

[Jonathan Edwards]

are to kick the issue into the long grass beyond the forthcoming elections, and to settle a personal score against Mr Cameron.

Any serious inquiry would surely have the wider remit of looking at how Ministers have handled all covid contracts, including investigating the National Audit Office's concerns about the VIP list of suppliers that are 10 times more likely to get a contract. In that regard, I will support the Labour motion.

If Westminster is serious about addressing its tarnished reputation, there must be deliberate moves to reduce the cost of politics. The Americanisation of British politics has resulted in an expenditure arms race. Over recent decades, political parties have had to spend more of their time raising money to compete. If we are serious about addressing corruption in politics, spending caps must be introduced for political parties, drastically reducing the cost of electioneering, with an added bonus of creating a more level playing field and a more plural politics. A wiser person than me once said:

"Nothing in life is free, you always pay in the end."

I fully support calls to expand the statutory register of lobbyists to include those working in-house, but the UK Government must go further. The Register of Members' Financial Interests is an important innovation, but the onus is on electors proactively to search for information that should be readily available to them. New protocols could include requirements for BBC Parliament and Parliament Live TV to list details of Members' interests on screen when they are making contributions. If there is no impropriety, why would anyone object? With slight mischievousness, I would even go as far as to recommend that Members should be required to emblazon their private benefactors on their clothing in the same way that snooker players proudly promote their sponsors on their waistcoats. I suspect such visual exposure might encourage restraint among those who use their role in the House to harvest coin.

I have long believed that Westminster is beyond repair. The time has come for us in Wales to forge a different path, where we can create an honest political discourse based on the noble aspirations of public service as opposed to the promotion of personal enrichment.

1.59 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Following the suggestion from the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) that like snooker players—I perhaps look like one right now—we should emblazon ourselves with any sponsors we might have, I am minded to say that I have absolutely nothing to declare in that regard, having never received a penny apart from my very generous MP's salary since I have been in this place.

With the local elections coming up in May, I am concerned that we are in danger of playing party politics in this Chamber. I should not be naive; that is what this Chamber is always about. At the start of this week, this Chamber was at its very best, and, of course, that is why I am dressed as I am. We referenced the Duke of Edinburgh and warmly referenced how popular he was because he was direct, loyal and non-partisan, and here we are today talking about election leaflets and playing party politics.

Of course, there is a serious point behind this, and I want to make a point in defence of the Select Committee process. I am very fortunate to be Chair of a Select Committee, and I note, as I sit alongside the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, that we will be in very safe hands in any inquiries that are needed or for any changes that have to be recommended.

It is not very well known that Select Committees can now group together. We have done so for the COP26 scrutiny, so we have Select Committee Chairs all the way across. We have it through the Liaison Committee. We can also move members of one Committee to another, so if there is a great requirement to review across Government Departments or for Parliament to look at an issue, it can be done as the structure is in place.

The Select Committee on Transport met this morning, and it would be fair to say that for even the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts), who was appearing before us, it would have been impossible to tell which party each MP came from, because we all united as one in wanting a particular approach. To make a Select Committee more partisan with a sole aim would be poisonous and would diminish the role of Select Committees in scrutinising Government, which, having always been a Back Bencher, I absolutely support.

It is not very political of me—it is perhaps a bit naive—but I am also a firm believer in loyalty. I touched on this at the start of my speech. I first became an MP in 2015 under David Cameron. I found him to be an inspired leader, a genuine man and someone who really wanted the best for his country and for his party. He modernised our party. He took the country from the very desperate economic position that he had inherited in 2010 and worked across the divide with the Liberal Democrats to try to make something better. He succeeded, as we see if we look at the 1,000 jobs a day that he created. There was much he did well, and he was a genuine, sincere and very public spirited man. It may be naive of me to stand up and say this as a politician, because we tend to bury those who go before us, but sometimes in life, loyalty—remembering virtues and trying not to bury those who are no longer here—is a good thing. That would serve us much better as a House than what others seek to do.

2.3 pm

Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con) [V]: I welcome the independent inquiry and the Government's broader work on modernising procurement. I do not believe that anyone can say that a new Committee is needed, as proposed by the Opposition today, when an independent inquiry is under way and when many Committees, including the Committee on Standards in Public Life, serve to scrutinise the work of former officials and Ministers. The point was well made by the Chairman of the Liaison Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), and by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg).

The Opposition's proposition today is not about securing an independent and legally minded expert in procurement to look into the matter. We already have that, and we should hear what he has to say. It is, I am afraid, a rather cynical and desperate attempt to prejudge an inquiry that is happening and take the opportunity to

make a party political attack. That is why the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) persistently mentioned the '90s in her opening remarks, but nothing about the period between 1997 and 2009. That, of course, was when we saw a long list of allegations about the Labour party—from Ecclestone, to cash for honours and the moniker of “Tony’s cronies” when it came to public appointments. It is also why, when the hon. Lady put forward a list of supposedly crony contacts, she included a Labour party donor. When she very much wanted us to secure PPE contracts, those contacts included a football agent company, an historical clothing company and a legal practice.

The Labour party does not want to wait for the facts but will continue with what I think is a rather contemptible policy of smearing people in public life, with scant regard for the truth or their reputations afterwards. That is what the Opposition did with Kate Bingham, until it turned out that she had done an outstanding job in procuring vaccines for this country—a job that she was not paid for, I might add. I am afraid that she has received no apologies from the Labour party for its smears when it tried to label her as a crony—and, indeed, no thanks for her work on the vaccine taskforce. Labour did the same with the race report; it has yet to criticise the Labour MP who likened those educational experts and public servants, who were trying to put forward solutions to improve the inequality situation in this country, to the Ku Klux Klan. It is desperate and quite cynical.

As people have rightly said today, this is a serious matter and it is right that it is being looked into. We should use the existing channels to get to the facts.

2.6 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): The overriding impression that one has received from following every new revelation in the Greensill case is of people making up the rules to suit themselves. First, we had David Cameron, the former Prime Minister, who passed an anti-lobbying Bill while he was in power, which conveniently did not cover the kind of lobbying that he himself then went on to do. Now we find that the Cabinet Office did not require its chief procurement officer to declare his part-time role advising a commercial company that wanted to bid for public contracts, and then—incredibly—did not require him to consult the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments about a full-time role with the same company when he left the civil service, because he was already working there.

As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I have attended a number of inquiries on the Government’s approach to the pandemic. I have heard time and again about the necessity of circumventing the rules to deliver at speed during the last 12 months. I broadly accept that principle, but again we see that the people benefiting financially from these emergency provisions are close associates of those who decided that the rules could be circumvented.

There often seems to be an aversion to setting rules in our political life: a preference for assuming that a combination of personal honour and political pressure—or “moral and reputational pressure”, to quote the Minister—is sufficient to keep people in line. There is a debate longer than my four minutes will allow to be had about whether our political culture has fundamentally changed to the extent that these principles can no longer

be regarded as sufficient. But suffice it to say that the lack of a robust system of rules to which everyone is subjected and for which the penalties are more than just damage to political reputation is a major weakness of our constitution. If there are no rules, or if the rules are made and remade and applied by those in power, there are no effective checks or balances on that power. If the rules can be easily changed or subverted to suit the circumstances, they are not rules and they have no discernible function.

For my own part, I think we are seeing a slippage of standards in public life. Our current Prime Minister has been sacked from two previous jobs for lying, and a former Prime Minister has been hawking his Government connections for personal enrichment. I believe that the behaviour of our elected Ministers has impacted our appointed officials’ perception of what is acceptable.

Doubtless the Government will respond by saying that Opposition parties have indulged in the same behaviour and that everyone is as bad as everyone else—and actually, that could well be true. At the heart of the Government and parliamentary machinery are human beings, and not bad human beings for the most part. But any human being asked to define how conduct should be judged will naturally seek to define that conduct in terms that favour their own actions and judgment. So let us not argue that everyone is as bad as everyone else and that the only arbiter should be the voter—or, if we do, let us accept that we are actually making the argument for a more robust system of rules. If everyone is dishonest, how can the voters use their votes to distinguish between us? If they cannot use their votes in that way, how can they be an effective check against self-interested behaviour?

I support the Labour party’s call for a Select Committee to investigate how Greensill became embedded to the extent that it did and to consider how the rules should be strengthened. Liberal Democrats supported the moves to bring in a lobbying register and rules to register ministerial meetings when we were in government, and we have previously tried to amend companies legislation to require annual company spends on lobbying of up to £1,000 to be declared in annual accounts. We will consider any recommendations carefully and back anything that can improve the current system.

2.10 pm

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con) [V]: I am delighted to take part in this debate. This debate was called by the Opposition, I suppose one could say, to smear the Government by attacking a former Prime Minister. Lobbying certainly does need a proper investigation and that is why I back the Government’s plan for a full inquiry, but this afternoon I must tell the House a more disturbing true story about lobbying.

I represent a part of Somerset. In Somerset, the county council started lobbying the Government for a big change: it wanted to become a unitary council. It invested millions of pounds to run a campaign and found a receptive ear in the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Of course, my right hon. Friend may have embarrassing experience of being lobbied, but I doubt Somerset County Council would ever stoop to taking money—it is not very good at hanging on to what it has got! One bit of lobbying led quickly to the Government’s decision to consider the idea for a Somerset unitary.

[Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger]

Somerset County Council reckoned it would be a shoe-in. More fool them, I am afraid, because it did not have the widespread support it claimed. The four district councils quickly devised an alternative and infinitely better plan for reform, which they submitted, quite rightly, and lobbied the Secretary of State. The next stage was meant to be a full consultation to discover if either proposal could command “A good deal of local support”. This pathetic and meaningless phrase can be interpreted by Ministers however they or anyone else chooses. The method for measuring local support was decided by my right hon. Friend. He chose an equally pathetic system of online questioning to lobby the local people. People can fill it in from anywhere in the world, with no requirement for the people who live in Somerset to have preference. You can legally respond to it from Beijing or Moscow, as probably they regularly do. I am sorry to say that this is a confidence trick.

The Secretary of State also asked the views of a very limited number of organisations in Somerset and lobbied them. The districts begged him to extend the list in order to be fair. Nothing, of course, happened. Therefore, the four district councils decided to let him know that they would arrange a referendum, with strict rules of participation to provide a meaningful addition to his consultation and lobbying. Instead of gracefully accepting this sensible suggestion, the Secretary of State has, I am afraid, thrown a wobbly. He has written to all four district council leaders rubbishising their idea and threatening them—threatening them, Madam Deputy Speaker—with the law! I have never read such a cold response. I am sorry, but it is not going to wash.

The Secretary of State has turned lobbying on its head. He appears to be using a big stick for those who have different ideas on upholding democracy and fairness. I will tell him straight and publicly right now that his actions should, must and will fail. The district councils represent all the parties we know—except, obviously, the SNP—and they are united against this. The referendum will go ahead and if he uses the law to stop it, then I am afraid lobbying has got a very much more sinister and nasty feel to it in this case. I urge anybody in Somerset to lobby to make sure that we have the voice of the people for the democracy they deserve. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I say to the Secretary of State: see you in court, or come up and sue me some time.

2.13 pm

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) [V]: After 11 years in power, this Tory Government have ended up like all Tory Governments end up—mired in sleaze. What is different about the scandal confronting us today is the sheer scale of the larceny being practised on the public purse by the donors, friends and beneficiaries of the Tory party.

The Greensill scandal, which is egregious and shocking, is only the tip of a very large iceberg. We have seen £2 billion of pandemic procurement contracts given without competition to companies that have donated money directly to the Tory party; VIP procurement lines specifically designed for Tory mates and, if you are the Health Secretary, your local pub landlord; a clutch of senior Government appointments awarded directly without competition to relatives of serving Tory Ministers; and now the announcement of an inquiry laughably

described as independent into the Greensill scandal, led by a man who is the son of a former Tory Cabinet Minister and sits on the board of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, which is responsible for the British Business Bank—it was the British Business Bank that gave Greensill Capital access to hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money.

This is just not good enough. We urgently need an inquiry that has the power to call for witnesses and papers, take evidence in public and publish its findings. There are many questions we need answers to. Why was David Cameron allowed by serving Cabinet Ministers to lobby so ferociously in his own personal financial interest? Why was Greensill given such untrammelled access to senior civil servants at the height of the pandemic? How did the Chancellor push the team to be more accommodating to Greensill Capital?

Why was Greensill—an unregulated shadow bank with a toxic business model—allowed access to the coronavirus large business interruption loan scheme? Was that pushed by Ministers, senior bank officials or civil servants? If so, at whose request? Did Greensill then exceed its lending authority and put even more taxpayers’ money at risk? Why was Lex Greensill allowed to roam so freely across Whitehall, pushing his financial chicanery? And why on earth was the Government’s senior procurement official, responsible for £40 billion of public contracts, allowed by the Cabinet Office to work part time for Greensill while he was still in the civil service?

The stench is growing. Only the disinfectant of a fully transparent and independent inquiry will deal with it, and that is what the motion before us would create. If Tory Members vote the motion down, as they have the power to do, they should know that they will be voting to try to brush this scandal under the carpet and treating British taxpayers with contempt.

2.17 pm

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this debate. After the opening speech by the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), I was tempted to go straight into a political attack and point out the failures of the Welsh Labour Government, such as not having a lobbying register after 22 years, or list the public bodies in Wales that are led by former Labour Assembly Members, former Labour MPs’ partners or former special advisers. But that will add nothing to public discourse, and it will not help this issue.

I was quite moved by what the Chairman of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), said about his Select Committee. I can attest, as I am sure Members on both sides of the House can, that he will do no favours for the Whips or the Government, and that it is a robust Select Committee. As the Chairman of the Transport Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), said, our Select Committees in this House are robust. The membership is beyond reproach. I jested with my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove about whether this debate was a vote of no confidence in him, but the debate really does not add anything.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) raised three pertinent questions, and there are some serious questions around this issue. I welcome the inquiry and the Minister’s tone. I do not

want to disparage the many former Labour Assembly Members who chair health boards or are on the sports body. They have a lot to give to public life. Many of them are doing an excellent job. I welcome their positions after frontline politics and I support a lot of them, but in this debate, it is very tempting for people on both sides to start making churlish comments about cronyism, and we have heard other Members say, “Just because of somebody’s political affiliation.” I would of course love to see more former Conservatives appointed to public bodies in Wales. Perhaps not as many Conservatives are appointed as Labour—Labour has been governing for 22 years, so I am sure their contact books make it a lot easier to contact friends—but that does not take anything away from what they are doing in public life in Wales.

Before I sit down, I will echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove, the Chairman of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, said. This should not be about looking at our Select Committee process and saying that it is not independent enough; that will do nothing for it. We should get behind this inquiry. If Members are unhappy with the inquiry, they can go through the Select Committees that are already in place and have the powers. We all have Members on those Select Committees, and there are already avenues open to the parties in this House to take up these serious concerns.

I will conclude and give the final minute back.

2.20 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab) [V]: The scandal of the former Prime Minister lobbying the Government for his new boss has rightly captured the headlines. I must say that it is really a bit rich for some Tory MPs to attempt to ride their high horse in this debate, because the rot runs much deeper. The whole system is rigged in the interests of the super-rich, and the super-rich spend a lot of money making sure that it stays that way. In the Tory party, they have the perfect vehicle for that.

The pandemic has cast more light on some very questionable practices. While there are 37p benefit increases, wage cuts for millions of public sector workers and tax rises for millions, some, on the other hand, have had a very good pandemic indeed. Vast sums have been handed over to Serco and the like—funds that should have gone to our national health service. Companies with connections to top Tories have been 10 times more likely to get covid contracts than those without such connections. The Health Secretary’s mate, the landlord of his former local pub, won a covid test contract worth a small fortune. I could go on. Instead, I will quote the words of the former Government chief scientist, David King, who said that the process of distributing public money to private companies during this pandemic “really smells of corruption”.

But it is not just in a crisis that the Conservatives look to enrich the super-rich. There was the Housing Minister acting unlawfully over a £1 billion property deal that helped the developer to avoid tens of millions in local council charges. He got his approval from the Conservative Government and, two weeks later, donated £12,000 to the Conservative party. What about the Tory MPs raking in small fortunes on top of their salary—as if being an MP is not a full-time job—making many thousands of pounds doing private consultancy work in a second job during this pandemic? It is shameful and, frankly, it should be banned.

One in three of the UK’s billionaires have bankrolled the Conservative party since 2005, and boy, do they get their money’s worth! There have been tens of billions of pounds in corporate giveaways for the rich from the Conservative party. I will end on the words of David Cameron—himself something of an authority on these matters:

“We all know how it works. The lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear, the ex-ministers and ex-advisers for hire, helping big business find the right way to get its way.”

The stench of corruption has grown ever stronger through this crisis and people across the country are quite rightly fed up to the back teeth of it. People are sick of it. It needs to be stamped out before it does untold damage to our democracy.

2.24 pm

Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con) [V]: It is interesting to follow the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon). In talking about a serious issue with serious implications, he perhaps illustrates the problem for his party, particularly when he talks about the high horse. I, for one, find it impossible to take lectures from him or from his party. Labour Members have either served or evangelised a Labour leader who was famously a “pretty straight kinda guy”, but who exempted Bernie Ecclestone’s Formula 1 from a tobacco advertising ban after a tidy £1 million donation and has had, shall we say, some pretty profitable gigs since leaving office. Or they wanted for Prime Minister the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who was present but not involved in laying wreaths for Munich terrorists and who presided over an unlawfully antisemitic party. That is without mentioning Labour’s cronyism—union donations—and the fact that the shadow Defence Secretary lobbied for Greensill. As Ted Hastings said, “You’ve got a nerve, fella.”

On the substance of the motion, I absolutely commend the remarks of my hon. Friend the Minister for the Constitution and Devolution, who detailed the action the Government are taking, and of my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), who detailed the activities of his Select Committee.

In response to serious questions on this issue, the Government are acting, and have acted quickly. They are going above and beyond, for example, the information required under the Freedom of Information Act. I also welcome their commissioning of the independent Boardman review, which will thoroughly and transparently investigate the issues around Greensill. That is in addition to the British Business Bank’s review of Greensill’s compliance with the coronavirus large business interruption loan scheme. It is really regrettable that Labour Members seek to disparage and discredit that independent review. I welcome the fact that the Government have been clear that either Greensill’s requests were turned down or that no Ministers were involved in gaining access to coronavirus support loans.

The Government are answering legitimate questions and legitimate concerns and it is entirely right and proper for them to be transparent and accountable; we all want that. They are giving a serious response to serious questions and, at the same time, they are getting on with the serious job of supporting people and businesses through a global pandemic.

2.27 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab) [V]: The Greensill debacle is, in the truest sense of the word, unbelievable. It is unbelievable that David Cameron was able to lobby with such impunity, unbelievable that Cabinet Ministers were able to engage so freely with him and unbelievable that millions upon millions of public money was bound up in contracts connected with more than one Cameron client. Most of all it is unbelievable that, at this point in time, no actual rules were broken. That speaks to a system that has lost its way, a former Prime Minister who has lost his moral compass, and a general public who have every right to lose what faith they had in this Government. From the top to the bottom, those in government are thumbing their noses at the people and the institutions that they are meant to serve, all the while enabled and protected by the rules, regulations and legislation that they brought in. Instead of accountability—the once vaunted “disinfectant of sunlight”—we have deals done over tawdry text messages in darkened bars and, bizarrely, in front of those lavish lights and fires. Due process has been damned.

I am proud to have worked for the public service and I am old enough to remember the last lot of sleaze from the Tory Government. I am a firm supporter of the Nolan principles—selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. The Nolan principles apply to every public office holder and we do have thousands of decent, public-minded people across Government and the public and private sector who wish to see this country do better, and that is our task today. What we are learning goes too wide to be confined to a quick review by the Prime Minister’s nominee. For example, the issues around the NHS do require much more sunlight. Well before the pandemic, in 2018, we had the episode with Babylon. We have had a Secretary of State who clearly did not see the NHS and its public institutions as doing well enough and started to skirt the process with the appointment of Dido Harding, the totally opaque plans for Public Health England, and a new superbody—again, about which we know little—to be headed by the Prime Minister’s friend. It is time to call a halt to this.

We have also seen Mr Greensill’s company get into the NHS—to use its name and trusted reputation to allow staff who cannot wait for payday to get paid earlier. Frankly, if the Secretary of State supported the NHS and paid its staff properly, Mr Greensill would not have yet another money-making scheme on the back of those NHS staff.

I am a proud member of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and I commend the comments made earlier by our Chair, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg). We are ready to serve. We have just completed three covid-19 reports, and all three reports highlight the fact that the governance arrangements have not been clear, and that senior accountability has not been clear. They are damning reports. There is a lack of clarity over the role of the Cabinet Office, covid committees, and the quad in decision making over the covid crisis. There is a lack of clarity over ministerial responsibility, particularly the role of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The scrutiny of the covid inquiry also highlighted issues with inter- governmental relations across the devolved Administrations.

On top of the dreadful loss of life, damage to our economy, and so much of our lives disrupted, people have made great sacrifices. We on the Committee are clear that any review of the Cabinet Office response to covid-19 should include examination of the governance arrangements, including Cobra, the C-19 daily meetings, and the quad and Cabinet committees. It is opaque. We on the Committee have struggled to get the appropriate Cabinet Minister in front of us, and to respond properly, but we will persevere.

2.30 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): As we operate in these covid times, we have an unusual setup, and we watch many Members from afar. Those of us who have dreamed of sitting on these green Benches, and the responsibility and honour that we have to live by and uphold when we sit on them, may wonder whether some of the contributions that have come from our screens today would have been made if the people making them had been in this room. It feels to me like some of the things I have witnessed on those screens while I have been sitting here have been horribly misjudged.

I think there is general agreement that some of the headlines in recent weeks have raised eyebrows, and that there is a level of concern that is shared across the House, but unfortunately, the Opposition and, in particular, the Members who I have been watching on the screens have decided to run with this in a way that is deeply unhelpful and does not help to solve any of the problems that they are highlighting. I therefore fear that this is much more about party political posturing than it is about clearing up the system, and I urge Opposition Front Benchers to consider that, and to think of ways in which we can work together to improve this system.

I listened to the tremendous contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) and for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose). I thought that their speeches had an adult tone and gave something that was deeply needed, which was perspective. I commend both of them, but I commend even more my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), who I thought answered the Opposition’s point rather succinctly and did the Minister’s job for her by saying that what the Opposition are calling for in this motion already exists. The concerns that have been raised are also being independently investigated, and I think that that is what the public would expect. Again, I come back to my fear that what we are debating today is merely party political posturing, and we should be doing better than that.

I would add a note of caution. We as MPs are exposed to an awful lot of voices within our constituency, and that is right: we meet many charities, many individuals and constituents, many councillors, and yes, many businesses. Those conversations help us to know more, to empathise and to understand, and that is an incredibly important part of our job. There is always a concern, when this sort of series of events comes to the surface, that the first thing we should do is stop doing that: stop meeting people, stop hearing other concerns, and stop hearing the concerns of business. That would be a very unfortunate development.

I have worked with partners across the east midlands on our freeport bid, and one of the strengths of that bid has been the fact that we have had academics, businesses, our local enterprise partnership, and our county councils

and MPs working together in unison. That sort of behaviour is what is needed to effect change in areas such as the east midlands, and we should not end up in a situation in which we put up too many barriers. I agree that we should have transparency, but not barriers, and it is important that we continue to have conversations with all groups so that we can make ourselves better informed. That is even more true if we happen to be in a position that does not allow us to meet with our constituents more freely, as Ministers are.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am attempting to get everybody in, but that does mean that after the next speaker, I will reduce the time limit to three minutes.

2.34 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): We have heard many contributions from across this House today and, frankly, I am disappointed that what we have heard makes an absolute mockery of democracy. The general public out there will be seeing not Parliament and government at their best but a revolving door of sleaze. As we have seen time and again, the Government have been rotten in their dealings. Every few weeks, a new shady deal emerges that reeks of cronyism and corruption.

Let us be clear what we are talking about. In the past 12 months alone, we have seen what this Government truly stand for: back-channel conversations, and multibillion-pound contracts awarded, with alarming regularity, to chums in the City with little or no scrutiny.

Let us start with the Health Secretary, who handed out a £30-million contract to his former neighbour and pub landlord, Alex Bourne—a man with no prior experience of producing medical supplies and whose company, Hinpack, was at the time producing plastic cups and takeaway boxes for the catering industry. Despite that, the Health Secretary saw fit to issue a multimillion-pound contract and put our nation's health in the hands of that company by allowing it to produce millions of vials for the NHS covid test. This did not come about through a formal tender and procurement process. I remind the House that all that was required, by the Health Secretary's own admission, was a WhatsApp message.

Let us move on to the Housing Secretary, who last summer admitted an apparent bias in reversing a planning decision against Tory donor Richard Desmond's proposed Westferry Printworks housing development, overruling local officials and saving the property developer an estimated £45 million. Mr Desmond later donated—surprise, surprise—£12,000 to the Conservative party, just weeks after sitting next to the Housing Secretary at a Tory fundraiser.

Then there is the Prime Minister himself, who is also up to his eyeballs in the murky world of lobbying. His former lover Jennifer Arcuri's firm, Innotech, was awarded £26,000 of taxpayers' money while he was Mayor of London. Unsurprisingly, that scandal was also whitewashed by this Government.

And now we have former Prime Minister David Cameron, who knew very well what he was doing when he started lobbying for Greensill Capital. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) about David Cameron's full comments, but we must also remind ourselves that he said that exactly this type of thing was the next big scandal waiting to happen.

Despite that, Mr Cameron saw fit to conveniently forget his own advice when he stood to make £60 million after setting up a cosy drink with the Health Secretary, sending a string of private messages to the Chancellor and, in the process, helping those two Cabinet members commit at least three possible breaches of the ministerial code. It seems absolutely right that the former Member for Bolsover, who is sadly missed in this House, called David Cameron "dodgy Dave" in 2016. He was dodgy then and is dodgy now.

None of this will be taken seriously by our current Prime Minister, who just days ago revealed what he really thinks about the role of big business helping to oil the wheels of this Government, when he said: "The reason we have the vaccine success is because of capitalism, because of greed". Government Members really are the Gordon Gekkos of the green Benches, who bleed to their very core that greed is good. As a former Conservative Minister told *The Guardian*:

"A little bit of money goes a long way."

It is time for that culture to stop.

There now needs to be a Parliament-led, cross-party inquiry, with a new Select Committee formed to investigate the Greensill lobbying scandal, and it should have the power to compel witnesses to give evidence and restore what we need in this country, which is integrity to our democracy, and an end to the grip of corporate spivs and spinners once and for all.

2.38 pm

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): Thank you for the opportunity to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker, although I am not sure exactly how to follow that. I remind the hon. Member for Ilford South (Sam Tarry) that I served on the Benches with both the current Member for Bolsover and the previous one, and I will take the current one—my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher)—any day, as, most importantly, will the residents of Bolsover, who determined that the 50-year tenure of the previous incumbent did not deliver the change they needed or the benefits of what he could have done since 1970.

The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover addressed some difficult issues constructively and appropriately—something that we have struggled to see from some Labour Members today. I am disappointed in that, because I have worked with Labour Members over my two terms in this place and we have had some constructive and useful discussions about such issues, particularly on the Public Accounts Committee, on which I previously served.

I very much welcome what the Government are doing. If there is an issue, a challenge or a problem here, let us uncover it, work through it and learn from it. As the Minister said at the beginning of the debate, part of the reason we are even here to talk about this matter today is that the processes have highlighted some of these points. There is a point about due process, because Labour Members stand here today on a motion that states explicitly that they seek to understand this problem and potential issues in more detail, yet every single Labour Back-Bencher who has risen in the debate so far has made a speech that bears absolutely no relation to that motion, because they have already decided. They are the judge, jury and executioner; they know better than the inquiry that they are about to vote for, which is

[Lee Rowley]

already being covered by a lot of other things that the Government are doing and the independent process that they have set up.

On a slightly broader point, I issue a note of caution, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover. As I have said, if there is an issue, let us uncover it and learn from it. But this should not be an excuse to say that all business is bad and to go on about Gordon Gekko and all that kind of nonsense, which is what we have just heard from north London. It should also not be an excuse for the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon)—I can almost set my watch by him—to come along and tell us that business cannot achieve anything.

On the Public Accounts Committee, I have seen that there is a huge amount of experience and skills that we need from the business community. We need to work together better with business. I have seen where it has not worked and where there have been challenges, but I have also seen the benefit that business brings to our country, to this place and fundamentally to our society—to address the point made by the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves). Yes, let us find where the problems are, but let us not do what we have heard from the Opposition today; it is not an appropriate way of solving these issues.

2.42 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley).

I welcome the announcement of the review into Greensill Capital and its links to the former Prime Minister and civil servants. It is absolutely the right way forward to address legitimate concerns about lobbying and this firm's interaction with the Government. I also welcome the appointment of Nigel Boardman—an independent legal expert with extensive experience in investigating Government procurement—to conduct this review. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for making it clear that the review will have full access to all the necessary documentation surrounding supply chain finance and full access to key decision makers during the process. For that reason, I have to say from the outset that I find the Opposition's proposals today both troubling and typically opportunistic.

Important issues around standards and ethics in public life should not be subject to political committees packed with Labour MPs playing sixth-form politics. It is disappointing that the Opposition seem more interested in scoring political points than ensuring that Government engagement with business, charities and other organisations is conducted in an open and transparent way. There is very little point in replicating the work of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), which already has the mechanisms available to bring this issue to light. The plans put forward by the Opposition today are yet more tawdry politicking, rather than a genuine desire to improve standards in public life; I will not be supporting the motion.

It is troubling that the Opposition seem to be pre-empting the findings of the review, particularly as they spent 13 years in government and did not once act on concerns raised about lobbying. Indeed, they even voted against

the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014, which required consultant lobbyists to register with a watchdog and placed restrictions on third-party campaigning groups; that is despite the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) demanding that the legislation be strengthened this morning on her tour of the studios—more positions than the “Kama Sutra”, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge what the Prime Minister said—that lessons must be learnt from this episode. In this House there are politicians from all political parties who, when they leave the House, will still want to contribute to public life; and they should be able to do so, as many of them have much to contribute, whether it is sitting on the courts of our great academic institutes, serving on boards of charities or, indeed, entering into businesses, either in an executive or non-executive capacity. The vast majority do this with the best of intentions, abiding by the rules on lobbying and engaging properly with the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments.

The Greensill affair is deeply disappointing, not least for those of us who admire the former Prime Minister and his work, but we should now focus on learning lessons from this, not teaching them.

2.44 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate after the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson). He described elements of the debate as sixth-form politics, but I do not believe that is the case; I think this is a very serious matter. I hope that he, and all non-Government Members, will see their role in this House as extremely important in holding the Executive to account. Whether they are majority-party Members or Opposition Members, every single Member in this House plays a key role in holding the Executive to account. Our Executive are very strong and all of us must play our part in holding them to account.

The Greensill sleaze scandal and the “revolving door” influence of the former Prime Minister is the latest in a long line of questionable practices by the Government. In recent days, the former Government chief scientist Sir David King has warned that the Government are operating a chumocracy and a creeping privatisation of the national health service even as we continue in our communities to battle the covid-19 pandemic, day by painful day. There is the deeply concerning decision to hand London GP practices to the US health firm Centene: a decision that has incensed many of my constituents, who are rightly concerned about the quality of their local healthcare. Our constituents deserve better than this. Time after time, it is one rule for them, another rule for everyone else. While Tory donors and former Prime Ministers have privileged access, the Chancellor denies support for others, like my poor constituent who emailed in regarding their livelihood crumbling during lockdown and said that the Greensill sleaze affair “is an insult to all self employed and freelancers”.

It is clear that the rules are not fit for purpose. Labour's amendment to the 2014 lobbying Bill would have caught out David Cameron's Greensill lobbying and would have ensured that any decisions to handle health contracts were made without the stain of cronyism hanging over financial decisions taken by Government. Ministers have been at pains to point to an inquiry into

the sleaze scandal, but it only scratches the surface of what should be investigated, ignoring swathes of dealings worth billions of pounds of public money.

We desperately need to remove the stain of cronyism that hangs over the Government. Today, the Institute for Government has described the head of the Crown Commercial Service, or the head of Government buying, working for Greensill as “eyebrow raising”, and has suggested that following the Robert Jenrick affair—the property development referred to earlier in the debate—the “stench of sleaze” will take quite some cleaning up to be dispelled. We need an anti-corruption and anti-cronyism commissioner and an integrity and ethics commission to clean up, and we need urgent change.

2.47 pm

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I do not know about anyone else, but when I stood for election to this House and was fortunate enough to be elected, I took very seriously the Oath that I made when I entered here. I stood for Parliament because I wanted to serve the public and do my bit. I did so because I believed in the integrity of this place and I believed in the integrity of hon. Members. I believe that everybody in this place actually wants to do their best for this country and for the British public.

I am very concerned about what we have learned about the Greensill affair over the past week, but I am even more disappointed by the reaction of Labour Members to this, because it does not just reflect on the Conservative party; it reflects on every single one of us. Those of us who care about the political culture of this country—and we all should, given that we have all stood for election to this place and made great sacrifices to do so—should all be working together to address the very real concerns that have been raised with us. When I drove in this morning, there was a sign attached to the railings outside Westminster that said: “Self-serving liars are destroying our nation”. I do not believe that any Member of this House is a self-serving liar.

I say to Labour Members very gently that we have structures in this House to look at these matters. If they had bothered to talk to my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), they would have learned that we have been reaching conclusions on these matters over the past year. We have realised that ACOBA has no teeth. We have realised that Members of this House are held to greater account for transgressions than Ministers who break the ministerial code. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has more teeth. We have been looking at exactly those matters.

Tomorrow, we are having the chairman of ACOBA before us to look at these issues. We are taking our obligations to this House very seriously, so it is very disappointing not only that the Opposition view what we are doing with no confidence, but that they clearly have no confidence in Opposition Members who are members of that Committee either.

On the issue of whether the rules are strong enough, the fact of the matter is that sunlight is the best disinfectant. We all can reach our own conclusions about the behaviour not only of David Cameron, but other former Prime Ministers. Whatever the rules are, and whatever the limits of sanction are, the one thing that David Cameron will be concerned about more than anything else is the damage to his reputation that has been done by this episode. Frankly, that will be with him for a very long

time. Let us be clear: we have some of the best standards in western democracies, we can always do better and we will be doing our bit to make sure we address some of these issues.

2.50 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), who made some valid and genuine points, and I am grateful to her for those. I am also grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, but I am mindful of time pressures, so I will be brief.

Many people across Newport West have been in touch with me in recent days in the wake of the revelations of text messages between the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks), the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the former Prime Minister, David Cameron. Truth be told, there is a really bad smell lingering around this Government and something has to give. The Greensill scandal is just the tip of the iceberg of cronyism rife in the Conservative party now. I welcome the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) from the shadow Front Bench and I will be supporting the motion. Simply put, we can stand for nothing less than the establishment of a full, transparent, Parliament-run inquiry into the Greensill scandal.

I say to the Minister that that inquiry must be far more transparent and open than the Boardman investigation announced by the Conservatives this week—an investigation that has all the hallmarks of a cover-up. I do not think we need to dwell too much on the bullying cases associated with the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), the Home Secretary, or the Russia report, held behind closed doors and resulting in little or no action from the Prime Minister—a Prime Minister missing in action yet again.

It has been clear from the range of people across Newport West who have written to me about this issue that there is much concern in the community. It is also clear that they do not believe the Tories can be trusted to mark their own homework. My constituents are telling me that they believe all politicians are corrupt and that we all have our noses in the trough. That is what they are telling me on the doorstep and it is what they believe. I do not believe it for a moment, but there is a real danger that the poor standards of some reflect badly on all of us here in this place and that is not good. To open up the process for scrutiny, key players in this cronyism scandal, such as David Cameron, the Chancellor, the Health Secretary and the Prime Minister himself, should appear openly in front of Parliament to answer questions at the earliest opportunity. If they have nothing to hide, what is the problem?

The shadow Chancellor, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), was clear yesterday that it is important to raise, as she did, that hundreds of millions of pounds of public money was put at risk when Greensill was given access to covid loans schemes. As Greensill has collapsed, thousands of jobs in Rotherham, Hartlepool and my hometown of Newport hang in the balance. Those workers and British taxpayers deserve answers.

It is 2021. We cannot sit back and stay quiet as a Government who supposedly represent our country cut corners, send texts and ignore the Nolan principles at every stage. It is time for a change of culture in this place.

2.53 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The revelations and allegations that have come to light in recent days are clearly concerning and raise a number of very serious questions. That is why I welcome the Government's decision to initiate an independent and wide-ranging inquiry. I was deeply reassured by the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) about the role that the Committee he chairs will play in these matters. It is clear that, between the two, there will be robust and comprehensive scrutiny of these events.

I believe that that lays bare the true intention behind the motion: to play politics with the issue. When the Government have already initiated a full inquiry, the Opposition want to go further and establish a Committee to duplicate the role of the very capable Committee already in place, in order to grab a few headlines. Let us not forget that in its most recent manifesto the Labour party stated that it would repeal the legislation that was put in place in 2014 to limit the role of lobbyists. That is typical of what we have come to expect from the current Labour party as it turns somersaults to create a few headlines while trashing the reputation of this place.

We should be proud that our nation's system of government is among the most open and transparent in the world. There are strict rules in place that Ministers follow. Accountability and openness are guiding principles of the ministerial code. That does not mean that things should not be kept under review and amended as appropriate, but I object to the cynical attempts by Opposition Members to constantly trash our country, our democracy and our Parliament. They do it almost with glee—they cannot resist the opportunity to drag down the great institutions of our nation.

Our nation, this Parliament and our system of government are respected around the world. According to Transparency International's corruption index, the UK is ranked 11th of 180 countries, on a par with countries such as Canada and Australia. We should not settle for 11th—we should aim to be No. 1—but to suggest that our system of government is corrupt to the core, as Opposition Members seek to portray it, is simply wrong and does a disservice to the people of our country. I know that it fits the world view of the far left. We were told that this Labour leadership was new and different, but time and again we see the truth: it is the same old Labour that despises our country and its institutions.

If wrongdoing has gone on in these matters, I am confident that it will be brought to light. The systems are already in place for that. We do not need another Committee. I will not support the motion today.

2.57 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I agree with much of what my hon. Friends the Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) have said.

There are two facts here that may appear contradictory, but are not. This is basically an honest place and the overwhelming majority of us are deeply honest and straightforward—there are flaws in politicians, but in this country corruption is not necessarily one of them.

At the same time, it is sadly true that the UK is an influence peddler's paradise. I will explain why; it has much to do not only with the weakness around domestic lobbying laws, but with foreign lobbying.

I will not spend much time on the points raised by Opposition Members; for a "loyal Opposition", I am not sure that they seem particularly good at being either. I know that the Prime Minister wants to do the right thing, so I will make some suggestions, partly based on a report that I wrote earlier this year with the Henry Jackson Society about looking into foreign interference in the UK and models for a UK foreign lobbying Act.

The problem is that the current lobbying rules are not fit for purpose, because there are barely any lobbying rules. In fact, it is very difficult to break the rules, because they are so limited: they are built around a very narrow definition of what it is to be a lobbyist and what a lobbyist does. Most importantly, they do not look at the lobbying done by law firms and reputation managers—the sleaze launderers and reputation launderers. If we look at some of the most corrupting elements in our system and at the relationship that BT had for 10 or 15 years with Huawei, effectively, BT, a corporate entity that had high standards—

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): My hon. Friend raises Huawei. Does it not demonstrate his point that there are very strict rules in this country that many companies and individuals stick to, but when it comes to foreign influence in politics, we must go much further? For the Opposition to have made no reference to that in the motion is a matter of deep regret.

Bob Seely: I agree. I thank my hon. Friend for his point and hope to build on it. If we look at Huawei and its relationship with BT, effectively, BT became a front entity for Chinese state technology in this country. Another example is Lord Barker, a former Minister who is now in the other place—I think that is the correct expression. We found out about his extensive work for one of President Putin's most loyal oligarchs, Oleg Deripaska, by reading the US media. Why? Because we have no foreign lobbying accountability laws in our own country, in much the same way as our domestic lobbying laws are very fragile as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) was right: a lot of us rely on a clean system because we are honest people, but the problem is that it is easy to abuse a system that is still largely based on trust, and it is often difficult to understand the ways in which it is being corrupted. That is perhaps the most significant problem.

We are talking about one individual politician, David Cameron. I am sorry to hear that he has done this, because actually I quite like the guy and hope he can in some way explain himself rather better than he is doing, but we are talking about one individual politician and one or two—a small number of—civil servants. However, the systemic threat of malign covert influence is not necessarily from specific individuals who may or may not be flawed, but is from states that use covert influence to try to manipulate laws and influence public opinion in other people's countries, and we now have a mini-industry of that in the United Kingdom.

To sum up to ensure others have the time to speak, I will send, if I may, to the Minister my report on foreign lobbying in the hope that when we produce these laws the Government will take into account some of the things the Henry Jackson Society and I have worked on, so we can try to clean up our system and these occasions become even rarer, as they should be.

3.1 pm

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con) [V]: This has been an interesting debate with thoughtful contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher), for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) and for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson).

Let me be clear at the outset: the Greensill affair raises serious issues that need to be scrutinised, answered and accounted for. However, what I say to the Opposition is if they want to talk about sleaze and corruption, they do not need a motion, they need a mirror. The fact is they need to go no further than the Labour-controlled Sandwell Council to find out exactly what that looks like, and what Labour in power is all about, because sleaze affects all my constituents day in, day out, such as the £300,000 spent on silencing a blogger who called out exactly the cronyism that we see the Opposition carping on about today, while we suffer from some of the highest levels of child poverty in the country.

I just say three words to the party opposite: the Wragge report. Perhaps some of them should take a read of it, because perhaps they will see then exactly what it looks like when they are in power, and the sleaze that is there. We know about the ongoing investigations and people should be in no doubt at all that some of the findings are truly shocking, including cover-ups, misuse of public funds, and reports being leaked and the use of private emails to cover-up. And those are not my words, but the words of the previous Labour leader of Sandwell Council.

So before the Opposition start carping on about sleaze, Tory sleaze or whatever else it might be, perhaps they need to look at their own ranks, and perhaps they need to come to Sandwell and see what it is like. As Julie from Tividale put it to me on the doorstep the other day, "Shaun, the only way we are going to sort this is by huffing them out."

Returning to the points raised today, there has been a theme running through this debate: we in this place, as Members of Parliament, have the mechanisms to scrutinise issues such as this. It is as simple as that; the mechanisms are there. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) for the work he does. He has said that he is ready to serve and so is his Committee, and we know full well that he can step up in order to do that. And it is right that he does, because we are sent here to provide that scrutiny of the Executive. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) was right: Back Benchers do have that role; we are here to scrutinise and to shed light on situations such as this one.

I am conscious of time and want to keep my remarks as brief as possible without repeating too many of the comments made by other hon. and right hon. Members across this House. We have the mechanisms in the House to scrutinise and to hold such situations to account, and the inquiry is very much welcome, which is why the Opposition should perhaps first also look at their own house and why I will be voting against this motion.

3.4 pm

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab) [V]: I am and always have been exceedingly concerned about value for money, conflicts of interest and the correct use of public funds. I sit on the Public Accounts Committee, and over the past year we have seen the workarounds and the flexibility to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. For me, that has exposed the weaknesses in our systems in the first place. It has exposed who the winners and losers are in our system.

When there is no competition, delayed contract publication or a lack of oversight, as we have seen this year, the fragility of the rules that we have in place is clearly exposed. When there are text messages, dark corners in our democracy and what can only be described as sleaze, the need for change is clearly exposed. This saga should shame us all. We should not have a system that allows individuals to interpret their actions as fair and allowed within the rules. We need to fix those rules and change the law.

Transparency International UK estimates that in-house lobbying could be as high as 80% in the UK. Labour's amendment to the 2014 lobbying Act would have caught out David Cameron's Greensill lobbying. We should be united cross-party on this motion. Every one of us has a duty to uphold the offices we are elected and appointed to, and we should never be afraid to answer the questions of colleagues in Parliament on these matters. That is why I support the motion today, and that is why many will view the inquiry as sweeping the issue under the carpet and fear a cover-up.

This issue also raises questions about where decisions should be made. If they were made closer to the people that they affect, would those involved have felt they were able to act in this way? Power and money can clearly be influential to some in this place, but we should remember that we are elected to represent the people, not private interests, and that those private interests should never view public finance as an easy-access cash machine.

3.6 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. Before I proceed, I think I speak for the whole House when I say how nice it was to see the Minister for the Constitution and Devolution, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), opening the debate. I am sure everybody sends her their best wishes, albeit virtually.

As my hon. Friend and so many others have said already, we all condemn the actions that are alleged to have taken place regarding Greensill and the involvement of the former Prime Minister. It leaves a bad taste in the mouth and, as so many have said far better than I could, it tarnishes us all. We need to ensure that we uphold the best possible standards in public life and that there is transparency in all interactions between companies, individuals and decision makers in Government.

However, that is not at all the aim of the motion in front of us today. The motion, if passed, would do no such thing. It is blatant, tawdry politics. It is ill-thought-through, but even worse than that is the stench of hypocrisy that remains in the air given some of the utterances from Opposition Members. I notice that the shadow Defence Secretary, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), is opening the next debate. It was he who wrote to the Business Secretary

[Andrew Bowie]

asking him to expand Greensill's access to Government loans. The hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) opened this debate, speaking about how we should go further and faster in tackling corruption in lobbying. In December—just last year—she said:

“Democracy is deeper than sporadic elections, it is about what happens in between with citizens' voice, rights and power. That requires guarding the independence and voice of civil society and is why measures in the Lobbying Act which mutes so many, really must go.”

The Opposition want to repeal the lobbying Act. It is frankly astounding.

As I have said, we need to ensure transparency and trust in politics. We need to ensure that the way companies and individuals interact with Government and decision makers is transparent. We must maintain standards in public life. However, the motion in front of us today would do no such thing.

3.9 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con) [V]: In 1998, I started my political career as chairman of the Uxbridge planning sub-committee in the London Borough of Hillingdon. The first requirement was to receive advice on how to deal with lobbying appropriately. An eminent member of the Labour party, Mr David Brough, at the time the council's head of democratic services, gave the sage advice that although we cannot always manage what lobbying we will be subject to, what matters is that, in office, we act in line with the rules and in the public interest in the way we respond. Mr Brough's advice was good then, and it is good today. The tone struck by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) was exactly right: the good governance of public affairs demands that we all pay good heed to those who want to bring matters to our attention, and that we exercise our judgment about how best to act in the light of this information.

People in office—in Government, in Parliament and in the public and private sectors—are continually lobbied on all manner of issues. Indeed, I first made the acquaintance of many current leaders of the education unions during the weekly meetings that the last Labour Government's Ministers held with them. That access was not afforded to other key players in the education sector. So, privileged access for friends of Labour? Yes. But provided that Ministers put those union demands into context and acted in the wider public interest, that was not an abuse of process. I am happy, as a Member of this House, to extend the benefit of the doubt to those in the party opposite who lobbied for Greensill and on a huge range of other matters on behalf of other organisations, on the basis that they did so in the belief that they were genuinely acting in the public interest. The same courtesy deserves to be extended to all in public office while evidence is sought and considered.

In the spirit of the constructive suggestions set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), it might be helpful to look at the local government training as a model for us in Westminster, to provide some guidance for Members on how to deal with lobbying. In my view, however, the case has not been made by the Opposition for the motion before us today. Calling for cross-party unity on this issue has been a preamble for

making unproven and unevidenced allegations against the Government, and that tells its own story. For that reason, I oppose the motion.

3.12 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: Five years ago, Dennis Skinner was ordered from this Chamber for calling the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, “dodgy Dave”. We already knew that David Cameron was callous: his social security and immigration policies showed that. We knew that he was incompetent: the damage that he caused to the Union showed that. And now, thanks to the Greensill scandal, we have further proof that he is indeed dodgy. There is no doubt that David Cameron behaved improperly, but we cannot let this scandal be reduced to the actions of a single disgraced politician. The Greensill scandal involves the Chancellor, the Health Secretary, two Treasury Ministers, a senior civil servant and God knows who else. It also shows just how lax the rules on lobbying are, and how this culture has infected the heart of Government. Greensill is the latest in a seemingly unending conveyor belt of cronyism scandals under this Government. In the past 16 months, we have had the Westferry development and the towns fund scandal. Government contracts have been handed to the Health Secretary's pub landlord and to firms linked with Dominic Cummings and the Conservative party while billions have been wasted on a test and trace system run by the partner of a sitting Conservative MP. I could go on.

At the start of the pandemic, the Government promised to do everything they could. I assumed that meant everything that Ministers could do to defeat the virus, not everything they could do to make their rich mates even richer. In the Labour party, we listen to the voices of the workers and the disenfranchised. The Conservatives listen to the greed of their chums and their donors. For many of them, this pandemic was simply an opportunity. It makes me sick that the Chancellor pushed officials to help a wealthy ex-Prime Minister while ignoring the excluded. When I raised the struggles of a business in Durham, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury told me that not every single job would be protected. Did the Chancellor tell David Cameron that not every stock would be protected?

We cannot have another classic whitewash where the Government mark their own homework. It is time for a proper inquiry, not just into Greensill but into the culture of corporate lobbying that plagues politics. It is a sad fact that the public do not trust politicians, but when they see this scandal or any of the others overseen by this Government, who can blame them? We need to demonstrate a commitment to ending this lobbying culture that protects the interests of the few at the expense of many, and that starts with a proper inquiry. I expect my protests will fall on the deaf ears of a Government who cannot hear me or the pleas of my constituents over the words of corporate lobbyists, but David Cameron's actions have once again shown that Tory Ministers cannot be trusted, so in the absence of the Beast of Bolsover, I will still refer to our former Prime Minister as “dodgy Dave”.

3.15 pm

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): I do not know how to respond to that, really. I will try to be brief, and it is much easier when we take the petty and

cheap politicking out of it. What we have here is an issue, and it is right that it is addressed fully, but the best way to do that is via the light of day—through transparency and having a full and frank investigation, which has already been launched by the Prime Minister. What we do not need is a further Committee when we already have one in place. We do not need to reinvent the wheel.

What we have seen today, as my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) mentioned, is trial by judge, jury and executioner, with people already found guilty before an investigation has actually started, let alone concluded. I think we are now seeing the party of opposition no longer opposing, but just being the party of opportunism. Quite frankly, that is depressing. It is depressing for this place and depressing for politicians across the country, but it is also depressing for the public.

When I go out knocking on doors in the coming weeks in Radcliffe, Prestwich and Whitefield, I do not want to say that we do not trust politicians because of politicians. We do ourselves down, when actually we have done a good work over this year because of the pandemic, and we do a lot of good work because that is what we want to achieve. We want to achieve the best for our constituents and the best for our country, and we do so. However, that does not happen when politicians stop listening to the people they represent. We saw that before the last general election, and that is why we are in this position now. We are a strong Government with a large majority because we did listen to those workers and we did listen to business.

Business does need to be listened to. Business is not the enemy. Big business is not the enemy. Yes, it needs to be reined in every now and then; well, that is not a bad thing. We need to make sure that we do represent everyone, whether that is the shop floor worker in Morrisons, the care worker or, indeed, the chief executive officer of a large multinational. We are here to represent everyone, and we achieve that by working collegiately, not by calling out former Prime Ministers, former Members and former right hon. Members as being “dodgy” or guilty before we even know what they are guilty of. That does this place down.

It is a really depressing day to be having this motion. I will not support the motion, because it calls for something that is already in existence, so I support my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) in allowing his Committee to carry on the great work that it already does, and long may that continue.

3.17 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: Over the past 13 months, correspondence and conversations with my constituents have shown how much damage the dodgy dealings of this Government have done to our public trust. The Greensill debacle is not the beginning or the end of the shameful behaviour of the Conservative party. From Dominic Cummings’s brazen breach of lockdown regulations to the Housing Secretary’s involvement with lobbying developers, it is hard to see what integrity this Government have when those awarded the highest positions of authority are allowed to get away with this. The Home Secretary was found in a report to have bullied her staff members, including swearing and shouting, but the Prime Minister determined that this was not an issue.

Now we are hearing that a former Prime Minister has been permitted exclusive access to some of our most senior Government Ministers to further his own financial gains. Journalism is uncovering this scandal, because the public really need to know what is going on behind the closed doors of Whitehall. Throughout the pandemic, again and again we have seen public money being handed out, through lucrative contracts, to the Health Secretary’s friends. We have seen the shambolic failure of the delivery of personal protective equipment after millions of pounds was misspent, not to mention billions spent on the failed test and trace service. Our poorest children have been going hungry because highly essential free school meal contracts were entrusted to a company that sought profits only. Now our Chancellor, the very person we have no choice but to trust with our country’s money, is implicated in these disgraceful underhand dealings.

We must have a parliamentary inquiry that covers the Greensill sleaze affair. The culture in the Conservative party that has allowed it to exploit its power again and again undermines its integrity in office. British taxpayers deserve a transparent investigation so that it is clear what those in high Government office have been doing with their money. After the farce of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report, named contributors to which said that their words had been twisted to show a racism-free Britain, we will not accept another Government-fixed pseudo-review.

3.20 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con) [V]: I am pleased to be called to speak in today’s Opposition day debate about the steps being taken by the Government to increase transparency while at the same time ensuring that businesses, charities and other campaign groups can raise their concerns with Ministers and that our Government can listen. The hypocrisy of the party opposite knows no bounds. Its own Front Benchers have continuously lobbied for companies such as Greensill at the same time as voting against measures to increase transparency and provide a proper legislative framework for lobbying.

Measures that the Government are taking include ensuring that lobbying takes place in a transparent and open way, voluntarily publishing more information than required under the Freedom of Information Act, ensuring that all consultant lobbyists are registered with an independent watchdog, and routinely publishing details of ministerial meetings and Government contracts. That is all being done while ensuring that Ministers are still actively listening to the businesses and charities that have been so badly affected by the pandemic.

I am glad that the Government, far from ducking difficult questions, are taking steps to further increase transparency following on from the 2014 lobbying Act and ensuring that the highest standards of openness and accountability are maintained at all times—steps that in 13 years of power, Labour refused to take. Indeed, in the last general election every Labour MP stood on a clear manifesto commitment to repeal the 2014 lobbying Act, yet the Leader of the Opposition is still taking advice from the former MP for Hartlepool, Peter Mandelson, who was twice forced to resign from the Labour Cabinet over cronyism. Thankfully, the people of Hartlepool will have the chance to elect a Conservative on 6 May and end the years of Labour taking that great town for granted. If we needed an

[Peter Gibson]

example of Labour cronyism and its commitment to fairness and transparency, we need only look at the stitched-up candidate selection in Hartlepool.

I am glad that Nigel Boardman has been commissioned by the Prime Minister to investigate concerns about lobbying following the revelations of the last week. We are assured that Mr Boardman will have access to all the relevant documents and those people who were involved in decisions at the time.

Today's debate is nothing more than yet another opportunist attack on the Government as Labour fall behind in the polls while this Government continue to support thousands of businesses across the country. The Opposition are seeking to score quick political points and generate soundbites while failing to address flagrant cronyism within their own ranks.

3.23 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What a pleasure it is to come down from the north of Scotland rather than Zooming in, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We are clearly in a spot of bother on Greensill, but I would certainly draw a couple of rays of hope from the debate. I have always had faith in the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), and what I heard from him today confirms my belief that he is doing a good job. I was very much taken by the point made by the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) about the fact that training might be very helpful.

My colleague and good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), made the point, if I picked it up correctly, that we are all in this together. That sentiment was echoed by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price). My intervention on the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) was along the lines that, as others have said, such a besmirchment of democracy is not helpful. To see this happening and to hear people in the streets saying, "You're all at it—you're all letting us down" is not at all helpful, and it is dangerous to democracy, which, after all, this place is the mother of.

I am going to take a leaf out of the book of the hon. Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) and go local. With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall return—mentally, at any rate—to the far north of Scotland. The damage and corrosion to faith in democracy needs to be taken with the local situation that we have up there. For whatever reason, unfortunately, in the vast area of the highlands, public appointments do not seem to reflect the far north. Local knowledge is essential to running services, as how things are done is quite delicate and detailed, and when people are appointed who are not from the area, that is counterproductive.

Finally, we have a Danish billionaire who buys estates in the far north of Scotland as you or I might buy household appliances, Madam Deputy Speaker—he just buys them one after the other. Other Members have heard me talk repeatedly about the great wish of the crofters in north Sutherland to take up the Government's generous offer of our hosting one of Britain's space

launch sites. It went through planning nem con—unanimously—and all the crofters support it, yet this Danish billionaire who is not elected by anyone will do anything in his power to stop it. If we can get it right in this place on the Greensill front and restore public faith in us, there can be a knock-on effect that will only be good for wider democracy and people feeling that they are actually being heard.

3.26 pm

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab) [V]: This is a scandal that goes right to the heart of Government and reaches deep into our public services. It is appalling that the ex-Prime Minister, David "Dodgy" Cameron, went looking to make a fortune via Government contracts. This happened at the same time as a senior civil servant started working for Greensill Capital while still the head of Government procurement, essentially wearing both hats for three months with the rubber-stamped approval of the Cabinet Office. This is not just a historical issue. Those caught up in the Greensill scandal include both the Health Secretary and the current Chancellor. They must now come before Parliament to provide full transparency and publish key evidence.

From PPE contracts dished out to drinking buddies to the US health corporation takeover of GP surgeries, Tory cronyism stinks, and interference in our health service stinks. The Health Secretary must face parliamentary scrutiny over his involvement in the Cameron Greensill lobbying scandal, and it must be made public how much access to NHS data and billing Lex Greensill gained during his period of special treatment within Whitehall.

The Prime Minister has said that Nigel Boardman, a former senior partner at the law firm Slaughter and May, will lead an independent review into the Greensill-Cameron affair. This is the same Nigel Boardman who, while working for Slaughter and May in 2018, was one of a number of financial advisers employed by the Government who were found by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee to have squeezed money out of Carillion during the company's dying days. Do we really think that Nigel Boardman is an appropriate or suitable person appointed by the Prime Minister to undertake the review of David Cameron's behaviour in relation to Greensill? It is not acceptable to allow the Government to pick and choose who they get to lead an independent inquiry into this.

Besides the conflict of interests, the review does not have any legal powers, and it is not expected to come up with recommendations for tightening the system. It is another way for the Tories to sweep a scandal under the carpet in the hope that the British public forget. Whether it was the inquiry into the allegations of bullying against the Home Secretary, covid cronyism or institutional racism in the UK, Government inquiries have either been hidden or led to nowhere in recent times. I urge Conservative Members who wish to stop cronyism, which is rampant in their party and in Government, to vote for this motion, so that we can uncover the truth behind this scandal and put an end to this unaccountable, corrupt capitalist practice.

3.29 pm

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind) [V]: Systematic and structural corruption at the heart of Government. Despite being elected by the people, they govern for the

billionaires and the corporate elite. In truth, I am not sure that any amount of transparency or personal integrity can change this culture of stench—I hope it can.

The Greensill scandal, with its implications for NHS privatisation, the former Prime Minister and current Ministers, is particularly shocking as it encapsulates the chumocracy of this Government, yet that scandal is just the tip of the iceberg of the cronyism that defines this Administration. This is a Government of the super-rich, by the super-rich and for the super-rich. Throughout the pandemic, the Government have given billions to private companies in shady deals that have led to accusations of corruption. A National Audit Office investigation of coronavirus procurement found that contracts worth many billions of pounds were given without scrutiny to private companies with little or no experience, and whose only qualification seemed to be a close personal relationship with a member of the Government.

My community of Leicester has been in lockdown or enhanced restrictions longer than any other area of the UK. For a full year, we have not been able to hug our loved ones or participate in anything resembling normal life. Given the immense suffering caused by the pandemic, it is absolutely appalling that some companies see the crisis as an opportunity to be exploited for financial gain. A select few with ties to the Government have profited immensely, while most people have suffered. Worse, the Government have facilitated an unscrutinised handover of public wealth to the pockets of wealthy shareholders. This is a Government who are frivolous when it comes to handing out public money to Tory donors or private companies, but penny-pinching when it comes to bailing out communities across the country.

The Greensill scandal cannot be swept under the rug. That is why it is so important that it is investigated by a full, transparent, Parliament-run inquiry. That is especially the case following recent revelations that the Government's chief procurement officer started working for Greensill Capital while still employed at the Cabinet Office, with access to Government contracts worth billions. With the scandal likely much worse than it appears, the Government cannot be allowed to mark their own homework.

In recent weeks, we have seen the disastrous consequence of self-assessment with No. 10's race and ethnic disparities report. Its conclusion that the UK is a world-leading bastion of racial progress was nothing short of state-sanctioned gaslighting. The Government's investigation, in its current form, will kick the issue of corruption into the long grass. We cannot allow that to happen. The Government must be investigated and held accountable. If they do not want to support the Labour motion, I suggest we have a judge-led inquiry.

3.32 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Every day, things get a little murkier. Every day, some new revelation appears that adds to the general whiff of sleaze that emanates from the Government. Rather than seeking to uphold higher standards, it seems that the Government want to underplay the importance of probity, sideline the principle of transparency, and behave as if the law does not apply to them. It starts with a friendly drink, then a cosy chat, and before we know it millions of pounds of public money is being siphoned off without any kind of open process being undertaken. Never has the phrase, "It's not what you know, but who

you know," rung so true. Never has the path to riches been so open to a select few, and never has our democracy been so warped by an erosion of basic standards.

These revelations diminish us all in the eyes of the public. That should concern us all, regardless of political persuasion. I urge Conservative MPs who intend to vote against our motion to think about what message they are sending to their constituents. If their constituents are like mine, many will have faced massive financial hardship over the last year. I have written to Ministers about the issues affecting businesses and individuals in my constituency in relation to the covid response, but on far too many occasions I have received a disinterested generic reply six months later.

My constituents and I are disappointed when their concerns are treated with such disdain, but that disappointment turns to outrage when my constituents see that those who have the Chancellor's mobile number have no such difficulty in getting an audience. The 3 million excluded, the health and social care staff scrambling around for personal protective equipment, and the millions of people who have given their time to help in the fight against covid have all given so much. When they see that this crisis has been used as an opportunity by some with the right connections to line their own pockets, they are disgusted.

Ministers should remember that they are not only custodians of the public purse; they are responsible for the reputations of the Departments they oversee. One of the schemes that that special access led to was essentially payday loans for NHS employees. More thought should have been given to the implications of that. It is clear that Greensill wanted the credibility that comes from working with the NHS, in the hope that that would enhance its reputation, but what about the reputation of the NHS after being associated with such a scheme? If it is thought that pay is so low that salary advances are needed, perhaps the Government should think again about the real-terms pay cut that they propose for NHS staff.

If we are to have lobbying, we should lobby for the Prime Minister to buy a dictionary, because his definition of "independent" is very different from mine and that of most other people. There is now a pattern whereby anything tricky involving the Government sees them marking their own homework. We know what happens then: reports on bullying never see the light of day, and the breaking of the ministerial code is no longer seen as a reason for resignation. For this Prime Minister, no transgression is too big to ignore, so I say to him, show some leadership, allow independent scrutiny and clean up this rotten mess.

3.35 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and his dictionary reference, because I am going to start with the "Cambridge Dictionary" definition of cronyism, which is

"the situation in which someone important gives jobs to friends rather than to independent people who have the necessary skills and experience".

Cronyism: the modus operandi of the Conservative party—backdoor dealings, special favours and bending Whitehall to its will. The Conservatives make it more

[Rachel Hopkins]

profitable to have the Chancellor or the Secretary of State for Health on WhatsApp than to have a robust, evidence-based case for economic support or a Government contract.

Over the past year, we have only scratched the surface of the Tories' chumocracy. First, the report on bullying at the Home Office, then Westferry, where the Government rushed through a housing development to help a Tory donor to avoid a £45 million levy. Then there was the appointment of a Tory peer as head of Test and Trace, without real process. Now we have the shady, unregulated firm Greensill Capital exploiting informal channels by employing Government officials and previous Tory Prime Ministers to access taxpayers' money.

The Government, again, put hundreds of millions of pounds of public money at risk by giving Greensill access to the covid loan scheme—and now thousands of jobs hang in the balance. No one should be able to dodge tax. The company that can deliver the best job should get the Government contract, and companies most deserving of Government support should receive it through the proper channels, but in Tory Britain, that does not seem to be the case, as we see the revolving door between the Government and paid lobbyists.

Many of us were shocked to discover that Bill Crothers was permitted to advise Greensill while in a pivotal Cabinet Office role, but also of interest is the fact that in December 2016, Bill Crothers became a subcontractor to lobbying company Francis Maude Associates—Francis Maude was, of course, a Conservative Cabinet Office Minister from 2010 to 2015. Who was joint founder of Francis Maude Associates? Simone Finn, the former Cabinet Office special adviser to Francis Maude, who is also the current Prime Minister's deputy chief of staff.

Given that one of the revolving doors in the murky world of Tory lobbying leads directly to 10 Downing Street, will the Government ensure that Baroness Finn fully co-operates with any investigation, sharing all relevant communications? Will they ensure that the role of organisations such as Francis Maude Associates is examined in the inquiry? This Tory Government have ridden roughshod over each of the Nolan principles—the seven guiding principles for public service introduced to combat Tory sleaze in the '90s. We need a full, transparent, Parliament-run, cross-party inquiry into the Greensill lobbying scandal.

3.38 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): This afternoon, we have heard a story of endemic cronyism—cronyism that has persisted for years and spread right across this Conservative Government and previous Conservative-led Governments. Parallels with the Conservative Governments of the 1990s are clear for all to see: jobs for the boys, all over again. Conservative sleaze is back. But as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle) said, there is a difference this time—a difference in scale. This time, we are talking about hundreds of millions of pounds of public money put at risk, and thousands of jobs.

What is staggering is the complacent and cavalier attitude of those involved, as so many have said today, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby). A former Conservative Prime Minister

thought there was nothing wrong with texting the sitting Chancellor and two of his junior Ministers to ask for special treatment for the financial services firm that was paying his wages. A Chancellor thought there was nothing wrong with pushing his team to see whether they could amend a Government loan scheme to give Greensill access to hundreds of millions of pounds of public money. A Treasury and a Business Department thought there was nothing wrong with Greensill being accredited as a lender under one of the Government-backed schemes, even when it had been rejected by another, and this mere months before the firm collapsed altogether. All this took place when the vast majority of public servants, civil servants and, of course, key workers were working with integrity around the clock on the covid effort.

We know that before that, David Cameron thought there was nothing wrong with setting up Lex Greensill in the heart of Government, with a desk, business cards and his own No. 10 email address, and nothing wrong with giving him access to contracts worth billions of pounds. Indeed, a contract was lined up for Greensill to provide supply chain financing across the public sector, and it was pulled only a few days ago, when this scandal started to break.

Similarly, the Health Secretary thought there was nothing wrong with meeting the former Prime Minister for a drink with Lex Greensill to discuss how their firm could get access to NHS staff pay, packaging up loans as bonds to be sold to investors and trading on the good name of our NHS.

The Government's former head of procurement thought there was nothing wrong with becoming an adviser to Greensill Capital while he was still a civil servant. I have never before heard of someone using the revolving door before they have even left the building. Ministers cannot wash their hands of that behaviour and say, "It was the civil service; it is nothing to do with us." As my hon. Friends the Members for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) and for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) made clear, successive Conservative-led Governments have set the tone and the culture that allowed the behaviour we have heard about today—an approach to public office whereby the accountability and transparency that we should all expect have been replaced by a tap on the shoulder here, a nudge and a wink there.

We need a thorough and genuinely independent investigation to get to the bottom of this, one that can take evidence, call witnesses and report publicly. Instead, as we have heard, the Conservatives propose an inquiry run by the son of a former Conservative Cabinet Minister who works for the law firm that advised the Treasury on the design of the loan scheme that David Cameron lobbied for Greensill to access.

As we know, the Chancellor continues to run scared. He has not been seen in the House since the day after Greensill collapsed. Yesterday, we called for him to come to Parliament, but the Chancellor was frit. He seems to have forgotten his enthusiastic communications about his loan schemes. Indeed, at one point he tweeted proudly about CLBILS—the coronavirus large business interruption loan scheme—with the hashtag #AskRishi. We would love to ask Rishi, but we would have to find him first.

In offering excuses for his absence, the Chancellor claims that neither he nor his Department had any oversight—any role whatever—in deciding who got access

to the public lending schemes he announced. He must be the first Chancellor in history to go on the record as having no idea about who was getting access to hundreds of millions of pounds of public money and how they were obtaining it. He promised to level with the public, but I did not think that meant the Chancellor telling the public he did not have a clue what was happening with their money.

As the Minister for the Constitution and Devolution said earlier—it was very good to see her via video link—the use of public money is overseen by the Treasury. Public money is not the Chancellor's money, and it is not the Conservatives' money: it is public money, and it should only ever be used in the public interest. It is simply not good enough for this Government to mark their own homework and hide from scrutiny, as my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) has just said.

Mr Wragg: On the point about scrutiny, and following the speech made by the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins), who is indeed a member of the Committee that will be scrutinising all of these matters—of which it is my privilege to be Chair—I wonder if the hon. Lady could seek not to correct the record, but to explain? If she is seeking independence of scrutiny, the motion before us and on which we will vote is deficient, because in paragraph (3) it asks that the members of that Committee be nominated by the Committee of Selection, which is entirely in the control of the party Whips.

Anneliese Dodds: My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) very ably answered that point earlier: she made very clear the basis upon which our demands are being made. I will be very open with the hon. Gentleman—for whom I have considerable respect—that as so many Members have said this afternoon, it is important for all of us that we clear this matter up and are able to call witnesses, including former Prime Ministers where necessary; that we can do so publicly; and that we can do so about the range of matters that this affair raises. I regret to say that the investigation that has been created by Government simply does not do that. That is why we are calling for the approach set out in today's motion.

Mr Wragg: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Anneliese Dodds: No, I will proceed with my remarks. The people of this country deserve answers, and they deserve to be treated fairly. That is a point that many of my hon. Friends have made very ably: the Members for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery), for Ilford South (Sam Tarry), for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

Last year, I was contacted by someone I will call Jessica; I am sure that Members on the Government Benches will have been contacted by many people like her. Before this crisis, Jessica had a modest income, but it was a reliable income. She worked as a self-employed tour guide and in short-term, part-time roles. When the crisis hit, she lost all her income, but she did not qualify for any of the Government's support schemes, and as an owner-occupier, she was knocked out of most support from social security as well. She was angry, upset, and worried about how she as a single parent could support her family. Obviously, as we all know as constituency

MPs, Jessica was not alone. The campaign group ExcludedUK suggests that there were up to 3 million people like Jessica: people who simply could not understand why the Government refused to fix support schemes so that they could get help. People like Jessica did not have the Chancellor's phone number. Last year, Greensill got 10 meetings with Treasury officials; the group representing the excluded got one meeting.

Most of the excluded are still waiting for help, and our country is still waiting for a strategy to support those jobs put at risk by the collapse of Greensill. Indeed, our country has lacked a strategy for steel for 10 years. Last week, I visited the Liberty Steel plant in Hartlepool. I was incredibly impressed by the world-class technology and operation there; by the dedication of the workforce; and, in particular, by the enthusiasm and commitment of the two apprentices I met. Their work is good, decent work, manufacturing materials that British businesses need. It is a world away from the kind of complicated financial structures and share options that seem to have been par for the course for Lex Greensill and David Cameron, but jobs are at risk because of Greensill's collapse and because of that lack of any strategy for the future of UK steel, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) made clear.

To conclude, those steelworkers deserve better, and so do the British public. Government Members know that; they know that their constituents are appalled by new evidence of cronyism and the sleaze that seems to be emerging every day under the Conservatives. As the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) said, Members should question why they are being asked to defend these events. They should consider the impact that this will have on their integrity. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) spoke of loyalty. Loyalty must be to the public interest, not to partisan friends, a point ably made by my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) and for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake). Government Members should, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) said, show some backbone. They should vote today for a full, transparent, Parliament-led inquiry to get to the bottom of this scandal once and for all.

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Julia Lopez): I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in this afternoon's debate for their very valuable contributions and for speaking with such passion on issues that affect us all in public life. The care with which we spend taxpayers' money matters very deeply to public confidence in Government. The respect that we demonstrate for rules and regulations is rightly a benchmark for trust. The systems and structures of governance in this country must at all times serve, and be seen to serve, those whom we are elected to represent, and not be exploited for narrow, private interest. It is right that we in Parliament probe and scrutinise any concerns raised on such matters and, to be candid, it is in the Government's interest, as much as anyone else's, to be able to provide robust assurances. As my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) said, if there is an issue, let us uncover it. It is for that reason that my hon. Friend the Minister for the Constitution and Devolution set out the existing framework for safeguarding and assuring the public interest. It should

[Julia Lopez]

be restated that that existing framework, much of which has been brought in since 2010, has largely been very effective.

On the questions raised by the hon. Members for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) this afternoon about the interactions between Greensill and the Treasury, as the Chancellor set out in a letter to the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), the matter was referred by him to the relevant Treasury officials, and following proper scrutiny, Greensill's requests were turned down. It was through transparency returns and declaration processes that meetings between Greensill and officials were highlighted. In other words, the system in that instance worked as it should, but it would be disingenuous to suggest that this existing framework has not been tested by the extreme circumstances of the pandemic and that the broader issues raised in recent days about Greensill have not posed questions that we are as keen as anyone to probe. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) highlighted that the scrutiny work has long ago begun.

Out of necessity and urgency, the Government have, over these past 12 months, interacted with thousands of individuals and organisations offering help. All claim to have had something to offer. Some do and some do not. Some have been referred by Conservative Members; others have been referred by Labour MPs, peers or those from other parties. Some are genuinely public-spirited; others only purport to be. Ministers and officials have had to take decisions that, at times, prioritise swift and decisive action over fulfilling the usual standards on timely and transparent contract publication, but we have been working extremely hard to rectify that latter shortcoming, about which I will say a bit more in a moment.

I also wish to assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we have not been waiting around for the Opposition to table a motion on these important issues before making improvements to our existing propriety and transparency regime. We are currently conducting post-legislative scrutiny of part 1 of the lobbying Act, consulting a variety of stakeholders to get their views on the scope and effectiveness of the legislation. I welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) and his practical proposals.

Bob Seely: Does my hon. Friend understand that many of us want the Government to do the right thing, and are grateful to them for doing the right thing, but understand that the lobbying Act, both for domestic and foreign lobbying, needs to be much broader? We need to take in the law firms involved, the reputation managers and the PR companies. It is not just about a narrow definition of lobbying, but all this lobbying industry that we seem to have built up in this country.

Julia Lopez: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. It is important to understand that we are putting forward a package of things. Some of the changes that need to be made are not necessarily through the lobbying Act, and we are looking at some of the issues of foreign intervention that he has rightly highlighted today.

We are already working with the chairman of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, my noble Friend Lord Pickles, to improve the business

appointments regime, which applies lobbying bans to former Ministers and civil servants. The committee has been actively seeking to increase the efficacy of the system by introducing a framework for the risk-based consideration of cases, greater transparency and better reporting of breaches of the rules. Members should note that some of the issues discussed in relation to Bill Crothers stem from the transparent publication of our correspondence with ACOBA on gov.uk.

On procurement—to reassure the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake)—we have published an ambitious Green Paper with legislation to be included in the Queen's Speech, setting out how we will provide commercial teams with much greater choice in an emergency. It needs to be understood that, at the moment, the options are a direct award, which exposes us to the kinds of claims of cronyism that have been peddled today, or full fact procurement, which takes far too long to turn around in an urgent situation. In relation to this, last autumn, we commissioned an independent expert review into Cabinet Office procurement processes led by Nigel Boardman, probing particular contracts that were raised in the NAO's report on this subject. The subsequent Boardman report was forensic in its analysis and very hard-hitting in its recommendations, and the Cabinet Office committed to taking forward all of them in full. Meanwhile, I set out with candour in a Westminster Hall debate the challenges that the Government had to navigate at the height of the pandemic and what went well and what, undoubtedly, could have been done better during the period in question. I recommend that debate to those hon. Members who have today raised concerns about the so-called VIP lane. It might make for a more compelling Labour press release to suggest that the story of procurement during the emergency has been one of Tory corruption, but I believe that it is vital that we understand what really happened so that we do not overlook what needs to change.

Far from being a secret referrals lane, officials dealing with the thousands of PPE leads coming in set up a separate mailbox to triage them. It allowed more credible leads to be sifted and it helped manage the correspondence that was coming in from Parliamentarians of all colours who themselves were being contacted by companies and individuals offering help. The Opposition like to suggest that those going through this mailbox were 10 times more likely to secure a contract. The most important thing to note, however, as the NAO does in its report, is that all PPE offers, no matter from where they came, went through the same eight-stage assurance checks. It should also be said that of the more than 400 offers handled by the high-priority inbox, only 47 were awarded contracts, which means that 90% were not.

In relation to the activities of Greensill, Mr Boardman has been commissioned by the Prime Minister once again to apply his scrupulous and dispassionate eye to the role of Greensill Capital. I am very glad to say that the letter from Lord Pickles regarding Bill Crothers will now also be considered. It is right that I do not seek to prejudge his findings. However, I want to address two assertions that have been made: that it will be too narrow in scope and therefore requires a broader Committee-led inquiry; and that Mr Boardman himself is a Government yes man. To those criticisms, I first say that it would be wrong to view this investigation in isolation. It is one work strand of several, which we

hope, when pulled together, will make for a much more robust framework. Secondly, I have seen how effective Mr Boardman's previous Cabinet Office review has been in spurring improvements and I have no doubt that any recommendations from his work on Greensill will not only be unsparing but lead to meaningful change should it be necessary.

It is worth reminding the House that, as soon as any of us are elected to this place, we become all too familiar with the trickiness of handling tactfully uninvited requests of a varying nature from associates, constituents and others. What matters is not necessarily that those requests have been made, but that we reach a decision on them, which is compatible with the principles of public life to which we all must adhere.

There have been claims today that current lobbying laws do not go far enough and should be extended, but I would guard against overly simplistic solutions that risk going too far in clamping down on avenues for interaction between Government and wider society. That point was made very powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) and others. This is particularly true when we reflect on the current emergency during which some of the most important contributions have come from those working outside Government. Indeed, one of my worries from this past year is that publicly spirited people who want to serve their country in an emergency will look at how the integrity of someone such as Kate Bingham was questioned and think twice before coming forward. What is important always, as I have said before, is that decision makers are able to test and interrogate the credibility of external inputs mindful of their own obligations.

Finally, in relation to the ministerial code, I hope that it will be of reassurance to Members that the appointment to the post of independent adviser on ministerial interests will be announced shortly.

Let me finish by returning to the Opposition motion, which will no doubt shortly be manipulated into a social media campaign that implies that Government Members are pro-cronyism and anti-transparency in imposing their convoluted solution to the issues raised today. There is no point in pushing for the creation of yet another body with a remit to scrutinise the rules on lobbying and, additionally, to look into the Greensill affair when we already have a number of—may I say?—very unforgiving Select Committees, the Boardman review and a whole series of efforts under way to improve our existing framework.

The Government are alive to the sincerely held concerns of part of the public, charities, non-governmental organisations and others about lobbying activities. They are looking precisely at the scope and effectiveness of existing legislation.

In the same vein, it is clearly wasteful for the vital scrutiny that is customarily carried out by PACAC and others to be undertaken by a second Committee. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) has already in this debate applied his sharp and ruthlessly inquiring mind to some of the most vital questions; I thought his contribution was superb. Lord Pickles will appear before my hon. Friend's Committee tomorrow.

We should focus, as the Government are doing, on strengthening our existing framework to satisfy ourselves and others that the mechanisms in place are sufficiently

robust with respect to the conduct of public servants and the stewardship of public resources, and that we uncompromisingly make those decisions in the national interest. Although the Government do not support the motion, today's contributions have shown the strength of feeling across the House and I thank hon. Members for them.

Beyond the political froth, I do not think that we are in different places on this. We all believe in and want the same thing: transparent government and behaviour in accordance with the seven principles of public life. The Government will continue to engage with parliamentarians of all colours as we set about raising our standards, but we do not need another Committee to do that. That would risk undermining the process and reviews that are already in place and that we should allow to conclude, so I urge the House to reject the motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 357.

Division No. 250]

[4 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Cooper, Rosie
Abrahams, Debbie	Cooper, rh Yvette
Ali, Rushanara	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Ali, Tahir	Cowan, Ronnie
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Coyle, Neil
Amesbury, Mike	Crawley, Angela
Anderson, Fleur	Creasy, Stella
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Cruddas, Jon
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Cryer, John
Bardell, Hannah	Cummins, Judith
Barker, Paula	Cunningham, Alex
Beckett, rh Margaret	Daby, Janet
Begum, Apsana	Davey, rh Ed
Benn, rh Hilary	David, Wayne
Betts, Mr Clive	Davies, Geraint
Black, Mhairi	Davies-Jones, Alex
Blackford, rh Ian	Day, Martyn
Blackman, Kirsty	De Cordova, Marsha
Blake, Olivia	Debbonaire, Thangam
Blomfield, Paul	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Bonnar, Steven	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Brabin, Tracy	Dodds, Anneliese
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Doogan, Dave
Brennan, Kevin	Dorans, Allan
Brock, Deidre	Doughty, Stephen
Brown, Alan	Dowd, Peter
Brown, Ms Lyn	Dromey, Jack
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Duffield, Rosie
Bryant, Chris	Eagle, Dame Angela
Buck, Ms Karen	Eagle, Maria
Burgon, Richard	Eastwood, Colum
Butler, Dawn	Edwards, Jonathan
Byrne, Ian	Efford, Clive
Byrne, rh Liam	Elliott, Julie
Cadbury, Ruth	Elmore, Chris
Callaghan, Amy	Eshalomi, Florence
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Esterson, Bill
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Evans, Chris
Carden, Dan	Farron, Tim
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Farry, Stephen
Chamberlain, Wendy	Fellows, Marion
Champion, Sarah	Ferrier, Margaret
Chapman, Douglas	Flynn, Stephen
Charalambous, Bambos	Fovargue, Yvonne
Cherry, Joanna	Foxcroft, Vicky
Clark, Feryal	Foy, Mary Kelly
Cooper, Daisy	Gardiner, Barry

Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh 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
 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
 McMahon, 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, rh 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, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt

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

Tellers for the Ayes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Gill Furniss

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir 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
 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
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinanage, 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, rh 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
 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

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
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 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
 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
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh 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
 Rutley, David
 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, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark

Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh 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
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Maria Caulfield and
James Morris

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.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I will now suspend the House for three minutes in order to enable the necessary arrangements to be made for the next debate.

4.11 pm

Sitting suspended.

Strength of the UK's Armed Forces

4.14 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the Prime Minister's 2019 election pledge that his Government would not cut the Armed Services in any form; further notes with concern the threat assessment in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, that threats from other states to the UK and its allies are growing and diversifying; calls on the Government to rethink its plan set out in the Defence Command Paper, published in March 2021, CP411, to reduce key defence capabilities and reduce the strength of the Armed Forces, including a further reduction in the size of the Army by 2025; and calls on the Prime Minister to make an oral statement to Parliament by June 30 2021 on the Government's plans to reduce the capability and strength of the Armed Forces.

Our thoughts across the House today are with the Queen and the royal family as they prepare for the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral on Saturday. His distinguished wartime career in the Navy was followed for decades by that same dedication to serving his country at the side of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.

We have called this Opposition debate for Members from all parts of the House to debate the Government's defence and security plans as set out last month in the integrated review, the Defence Command Paper and the defence and security industrial strategy. Our starting point is the Prime Minister. He said at the launch of his 2019 election manifesto on behalf of all Conservative Members here:

"We will not be cutting our armed forces in any form. We will be maintaining the size of our armed forces".

He may take the pledges that he makes to our armed forces and the public lightly; we do not. The integrated review confirms:

"State threats to the UK...are growing and diversifying", yet the defence review is a plan for fewer troops, fewer ships and fewer planes over the next three to four years.

I am disappointed that the Defence Secretary cannot be here to answer the growing chorus of concerns about his defence plans, but for today we entirely accept his attendance at the NATO special meeting on Ukraine. That in itself reinforces the warnings in the Defence Command Paper, which said:

"Russia continues to pose the greatest nuclear, conventional military and sub-threshold threat to European security."

That heightens the widening concerns about cutting the strength of the UK's armed forces in the face of growing global threats, instabilities and uncertainties.

There are so many serious flaws in the defence review and the industrial strategy. There is no assessment of current or future capability, no strategic principles or assumptions and nothing about how the Ministry of Defence should be structured or staffed in order to best provide national security. There is no recognition that the UK's research capacity has been run down over the last decade by deep cuts to defence research and development, and no plan to absorb the £6.6 billion now pledged over the next four years.

There is no system for identifying and supporting the small companies that produce so much of our invention. There is nothing about what defence can get from greater advances in civil industry or what it can provide

to civil industry and civil society. There is no explanation of how we will sustain the forward-deployed, front-footed, persistently globally deployed and engaged armed forces with so few ships and transport aircraft. There are no evident contingency plans to replace the losses of key equipment in conflict. There is nothing about mothballing equipment retired from service, like so many other countries do, rather than disposing of it on the narrow grounds that it saves money. I could go on, and I will on other occasions, but for today, our debate and our motion focus on the central concern about decisions to cut the strength of our armed forces in the face of growing threats and in breach of the Prime Minister's personal pledge at the election.

In view of the interest—I am delighted to see that Members from all sides want to contribute to this debate—I want to make four main arguments and then look forward to what colleagues have to say. First, on numbers, with the threats to the UK growing and diversifying, there is a strong case against, not for, further cuts to the size of our armed forces. The Defence Secretary has announced that the Army's established strength will be cut by 10,000 to just 72,500 over the next four years. That will be the smallest British Army for 300 years. Ministers can only promise no redundancies because all three forces are already well below the strength that the Government set out was required in the 2015 defence review.

Of course we must develop new technologies in domains such as cyber-space and artificial intelligence, but the British infantry—as the Minister knows better than anyone—has been the foundation on which the defence of the UK has relied for over 350 years. New technologies have always been harnessed to strengthen its capabilities, but they have never replaced entirely the need for boots on the ground.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I have some sympathy for the right hon. Gentleman's position, because when I was the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, I spent a lot of time criticising the then Labour Government for cutting the size of the infantry and the Army. The clear implication is that the next Labour Government would be spending more than the present Government, so how much more money would a future Labour Government be putting into defence compared to what we are spending, which, of course, has increased already?

John Healey: Sadly we are nowhere near another election at this point. We are at this stage in the parliamentary cycle with these plans on the table, and our interest is in the Government getting this right. The decisions taken now will set the shape of our defence forces for the next 10 years. The decisions taken now will be the framework with which a future Labour Government, after the next election, will have to live.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Would my right hon. Friend care to remind the hon. Member for somewhere in Essex—the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin)—that one of the reasons there is a big gap is that a previous Conservative Government, in a fit of vandalism, sold off the married quarters estate, costing the Ministry of Defence billions?

John Healey: I would, but my right hon. Friend has just done so for me; I am pleased that it is on the record.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

John Healey: I will give way one more time, but then—conscious that nearly 40 Back-Bench Members wish to speak—I will make some progress.

Mr Jones: The hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) mentioned budgets, but is not it a fact that the defence budget has been cut by nearly 25% since 2010? Even with the increase that has been announced recently, the defence budget is now 5% lower than it was in 2010.

John Healey: My right hon. Friend is right, of course. There has been an £8 billion real-terms cut to the defence budget since 2010. That is part of the reason that we have seen 45,000 full-time forces cut over the last decade. I will return to some of those points.

For now, I want to make this point: we can destroy enemy forces with technology, but we cannot seize and hold ground without troops. Drones and robots do not win hearts and minds; they do not mend broken societies; they do not give covid jobs. These deeper cuts now planned could limit our forces' capacity simultaneously to deploy overseas, support allies, maintain our own strong national defences and reinforce our domestic resilience, as we have seen our troops do to help our country through the covid crisis. Other countries have expanded troop numbers even as they develop technology. They do not see this as a "manpower or machines" question, but as personnel and technology together. Although high-tech weapons systems are essential, highly-trained personnel are simply indispensable, and size matters.

These planned cuts are damaging for four reasons. Let us call them "the four Rs". The first is resilience. Cutting Army numbers reduces the UK's national resilience by reducing our capacity to react to unforeseen circumstances at home and abroad—not just major wars, but insurgencies such as Afghanistan, international interventions such as Sierra Leone or Kosovo, and emergency support operations such as post terrorist attacks or during covid.

The second "R" is readiness. The rapid response required to the unexpected also requires highly-trained, adaptable, cohesive combat troops, which even the best reserves, called up as last-minute reinforcements, cannot provide.

The third "R" is renewal. The fewer troops and full-strength battalions we have, the less able the Army is to sustain long campaigns. Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq all required the long-term rotation of troops. We are a leading member of NATO. We are one of the P5 countries at the UN Security Council. We may again be called on to deploy and sustain forces away from the UK. We may not seek a major crisis, but we may well face a major crisis that comes to us.

The final "R" is reputation. The current Chief of the Defence Staff said in 2015 that the ability to field a single war-fighting division was

"the standard whereby a credible army is judged",

yet the fully capable division mandated then, including a new strike brigade, will not be battle-ready for another 10 years according to evidence that the MOD gave to

the Defence Committee in the autumn. A former CDS, General Sir David Richards, has said that further cuts to the Army would mean that the UK was

"no longer taken seriously as a military power"

and that this would

"damage our relationship with the US and our position in NATO".

My second argument is that this is not just about numbers. In the face of growing threats and the increasing ambition for the global role that our armed forces will play, there is a strong case against, not for, some of the Government's short-term capability cuts. Taking two Type 23 frigates out of service in the next two years will reduce the Navy's anti-submarine strength. Ending the RAF's E-3 planes will leave a two-year gap in airborne early warning before the E-7 Wedgetails come into service in 2023. The Army is losing nine Chinook helicopters, 14 Hercules transporter planes and 20 Puma support helicopters.

The third argument is one that I am sad to have to make, and it is this: we are faced now with more of the same. After a decade of decline since 2010, which the Prime Minister called an "era of retreat", the Defence Secretary promised that this defence review would be different from the last two Conservative defence reviews, which weakened the foundations of our armed forces. They were driven by finances, not by threats, cutting full-time forces by 45,000 and cutting critical defence capabilities and upgrades, alongside plans for full capability forces in the future that have not been fulfilled. I fear that this defence review simply makes the same mistakes of the past.

Fourth and finally, in November, when the Prime Minister announced the extra funding as part of a four-year funding settlement, we welcomed it as promising a long overdue upgrade of Britain's defences, so we are dismayed now by more defence cuts, despite this £16.5 billion boost. But I guess it is not hard to see why. The defence budget was balanced in 2012, and the equipment programme was fully funded, but Ministers since then have lost control. The National Audit Office has now judged the defence equipment plan unaffordable for the last four years in a row and reports a black hole of more than £17 billion over the next 10 years. This black hole in the defence budget has grown by £4 billion in the last year, on this Defence Secretary's watch. The MOD's annual report and accounts suggest that the annual marginal cost for 10,000 Army personnel is around half a billion pounds. This deficit alone each year could cover the cost of maintaining Army numbers three times over.

The new defence budget is not all it seems. Ministers talk about the rise in capital funding but not the real cut in revenue funding over the next four years, which means less money for forces' recruitment, training, pay and families. It means a possible cut of 40% to the budget of the Office for Veterans' Affairs. Worse still, over half this year's £16.4 billion defence equipment budget is revenue-based for equipment support and maintenance. This revenue cut is the Achilles heel of defence plans. No other Whitehall Department is projected to have a cut in day-to-day spending between now and 2024-25. The Defence Secretary should never have agreed it.

This defence review and the defence and security industrial strategy announce nothing new that Ministers are doing to get a grip of the MOD's budget failings and to make the most of this big, one-off opportunity

[John Healey]

from the extra funding. So I say to the Minister: get to grips with the budget, consider the concerns raised, rethink the plans and report back to Parliament before the end of June. Britain was promised better, Britain deserves better and Britain needs better from its Defence Department.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I call the Minister, I should tell the House that there will be an initial time limit on Back-Bench speeches of four minutes, but that will reduce quite soon to three minutes.

4.30 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey): I thank the shadow Secretary of State for the tribute he paid to the Duke of Edinburgh—one with which I very much agree, and I know all of my colleagues in the Ministry of Defence do too. The military are taking great pride in their preparations for his funeral on Saturday, where they hope to give him the send-off he deserves.

I welcome this debate. We live in a new age of systemic competition where information, data and technology shape conflict every bit as much as ships, tanks and fighter jets. Military hardware can be undermined by cyber-attacks or by the severing of undersea cables, while the use of proxy forces and other covert and deniable activities makes it harder to determine when the threshold of war has been crossed. So we have to think about defence differently.

“The Integrated Operating Concept 2025”, published last year, changes the way we think about our response to conflict. No longer can we have a contingent force sat in the UK waiting for the fight. Instead we must be operating persistently around the globe in forging partnerships, building capacity, tackling insecurity and competing with our adversaries. Make no mistake, however: we recognise that we cannot be upstream of every potential conflict and that we must therefore not only be able to operate but able to fight.

We can all be nostalgic over the force structures that won the wars of yesteryear. Undoubtedly there is a comfort in looking out of the window and seeing row upon row of the capabilities that have kept us safe in the past. But as surely as hoof became wheel and sail gave way to steam, we should all be clear that technology is moving on quickly and industrial capabilities will no longer get the job done alone. We have a duty to the British men and women of our armed forces not to indulge in a game of military bingo, obsessed with the metrics of previous conflicts. Instead we must keep adapting to the threat, because the reality is that if we fail to change, we will be defeated.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about adapting to the threat. We have the technological advantage in Afghanistan, yet Afghanistan has been seen as a failure—something he is more familiar with than many in this House. Now that the United States has declared that it is going to withdraw its troops, could he confirm what will happen to the British troops that are based there?

James Heappey: As the shadow Secretary of State noted, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not able to respond to this debate in person because he is at

the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, along with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. The decisions on this are being taken this afternoon in Brussels. I hope that my right hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not pre-empt that, but I am certain that either the Defence Secretary or the Foreign Secretary will want to notify the House with appropriate urgency if and when such a decision has been made.

John Spellar: The Minister was slightly dismissive of looking at the arrays of traditional vehicles. What does he think is now massing on the borders of Ukraine as a direct challenge to NATO?

James Heappey: If the right hon. Gentleman will allow, I will make some progress with my speech, because I had foreseen that such challenge may come.

Over the past 20 years, as we have been engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, our adversaries have been watching and learning from how insurgent forces, hopelessly over-matched in a conventional sense, have still been able to impose enormous costs on our military and the militaries of our allies. There has been no sentimentality in the way that they have accelerated into new domains and experimented with new technologies.

The Defence Command Paper captures that reality. Last November, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister laid the groundwork for the modernisation of our forces by granting defence the most generous settlement since the cold war, with a commitment to spend £188 billion on defence over the coming four years—an increase of £24 billion. Our Command Paper has taken that investment and used it to deliver a more technologically advanced, better integrated and therefore more deadly force that will underpin our nation's firepower in this new age of systemic competition. Inevitably this has meant some hard choices, but it is worth reminding ourselves, especially given the rather pessimistic view of the inventory set out by the shadow Secretary of State, what is actually still in the inventory.

At sea, we have the best carriers, air defence destroyers and hunter-killer submarines in the world, and our Navy will be enhanced further by the best anti-submarine warships and new general purpose frigates already under construction at Rosyth and on the Clyde. The Royal Navy's fleet is growing for the first time since the cold war and, with the renewal of our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent, makes us the foremost naval power in Europe.

In the air, we will have updated Typhoons, brand-new F-35 Lightning stealth fighters, new unmanned systems capable of striking remotely and massive investment in the next generation of fighter jets and swarming drones.

On the ground, while our Army will be leaner, it will also be more integrated, more active and more lethal—pound-for-pound the most innovative and effective in the world, able to make the most of new Ajax vehicles, revamped attack helicopters, brand-new Boxer armoured fighting vehicles, state-of-the-art air defence, long-range precision artillery and new electronic warfare capabilities. It has taken far too long to get these updates, but we are going to have the best-equipped Army in Europe by the end of the decade.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I know that the Minister is a friend of Northern Ireland, but recruitment in Northern Ireland has been at its highest level and

recruitment to the Territorial Army has maxed out at this moment in time. Can the Minister give an assurance that extra recruitment and places will be made available for Northern Ireland, because more TA soldiers could be recruited?

James Heapey: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right that Northern Ireland is a rich recruiting ground for people wanting to serve in our armed forces, and especially our reserve. The reserve has an important part to play in the plans the Army, Navy and Air Force have for the future, and I have every expectation that we will be able to extend increased opportunity to Northern Ireland. The detail of that has yet to be confirmed, but I hope that within the next couple of months the hon. Gentleman will get a more detailed answer to his question.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The Minister has outlined a concept predicated on the armed forces fighting an all-out war—a war where no holds are barred and we use everything. I get that; I understand grey-zone thinking—I am a strategist, too; I read it in great detail at university. However, for 70 years we have never fought anything like such a war; instead, we have had limited operations, we have had counter-insurgency operations, and we have had peacekeeping and peace-making, and this Government are preparing to cut the very people—the lifeblood—that carries out such operations, and that really worries me.

James Heapey: I thank my right hon. and gallant Friend for his intervention, but I do not agree with his analysis. In this part of my speech I am setting out the conventional war-fighting capabilities because the shadow Secretary of State set out a very pessimistic view of what they would be, but the reality is that the key change being made through the integrated review and Defence Command Paper is to enhance the capabilities my right hon. Friend rightly stresses will be in most demand as we address the challenges of tomorrow, and they are the ones that exist below the threshold of conflict. If he will indulge me, in a couple of minutes he will hear some of the things that I think might answer his question in more detail.

That is why we are investing heavily in the national cyber force, bringing together the resources of the Ministry of Defence and the intelligence community to deceive, degrade, deny, disrupt and destroy targets in and through cyber-space. It is also why we have established a new space command that will enhance our military surveillance and communication capabilities from space, assist in the co-ordination of commercial space operations and lead the development of new low and high orbit capabilities.

Moreover, we know that the threats to UK interests, both in space and in cyberspace, are not just from ones and zeroes. Our adversaries are investing in capabilities that put our undersea fibre-optic cables and our satellites at physical risk as well, so we need the ability to protect and defend our interests in the depths of the oceans and in the heights of space.

Nor are we alone in seeking to modernise. Our adversaries as well as our allies are making rapid headway, and some of the most cutting-edge capabilities are now commercially available, meaning that the highest grade technology is no longer the preserve of the best resourced militaries. So we are investing to stay ahead of the curve and recover our technological edge, putting aside at

least £6.6 billion for research and development to supercharge innovation in the next generation of disruptive capabilities, from directed energy weapons to swarming drones.

But it is not just about what you've got; it is what you do with it. I have already set out the vision of the integrated operating concept, and over the next year or two the Ministry of Defence will be expanding our forward presence around the world as we shift from a contingent force waiting for the fight to one that operates and competes constantly. In the land domain, some of our most effective work is with small specialised infantry teams developing the capacity of partner forces in the parts of the world that cause us concern. We are reinforcing that success through the creation of the special operations-capable rangers and thus doubling the size of our partnering force. Our fighting brigades, meanwhile, will move to higher readiness so that they can deploy and operate more quickly. They will also gain capabilities that allow them to engage their enemy at greater range, thus reflecting the lessons on close combat learned from recent conflicts in northern Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr Ellwood: I need to clarify the difference between what the rangers will do and what our Royal Marines do, because the Royal Marines are concerned that they are being put out of a job. Everything that my hon. Friend has just described could be done by the Royal Marines. Let us take an example in Mozambique. Were we to put this rangers brigade in, who would replace them after five or six months? Where is the endurance capability that our armed forces need to provide?

James Heapey: I am afraid that my right hon. Friend is not right in what he thinks the rangers will do. The distinction is that 16 Air Assault, the Parachute Regiment and 3 Commando Brigade, as high-readiness contingent forces who are there to fight at short notice in hostile contested environments such as the ones he describes, still do exactly that from the air or the sea, depending on whether it is 16 Air Assault or 3 Commando. The rangers will be a special operations-capable partnering force designed to train, advise, assist and accompany partner forces in conflicts around the world, not to be a fighting force in and of themselves. That distinction is one that we have observed from the success of the US Green Berets, which have been very successful, and we are looking forward to having that as part of the toolkit for the UK armed forces in the future.

Needless to say, in increasing readiness and being able to operate more quickly, there is still a requirement for war-fighting mass, and that leads to a long overdue revisiting of what we ask of our reservists. I am very much looking forward to the publication of the reserve forces 2030 review, and I am confident that in the discussion that follows we will come out with an exciting proposition of what it means to serve in the reserve and what value that can add as we generate war-fighting mass.

In the air, we have created a joint squadron with Qatar, and we are looking at how this concept can be extended further with other partner air forces, as well as offering world-leading flying training to helicopter and fast jet pilots from our allies around the world. Meanwhile, investment in the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, in the E-7 airborne command and control, in the Protector uncrewed surveillance and strike platform and in a network of airfields from which we can operate the full

[James Heapey]

range of RAF capabilities, enhances our capacity to understand our adversaries, find them quickly and strike them wherever they are, all around the globe.

At sea, we have had forward deployed ships in the Caribbean and the Falklands for a number of years, and I can announce to the House that last week HMS Trent arrived in Gibraltar, where she will now be permanently based in order to service the UK's interests in both the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Guinea. Later in the year, a further offshore patrol vessel will sail for the Indo-Pacific, where she will also be permanently forward based. The maritime forward presence is further enhanced by the restoration of our high-readiness global carrier strike capability and the new littoral response groups providing an at-sea high readiness amphibious response force on NATO's northern and southern flanks.

However, let there be no misunderstanding: we are clear-eyed on the realities of geography. We are a Euro-Atlantic power and deeply invested in the security of Europe. NATO is the cornerstone of our national security, so our priority is our partnership with other Euro-Atlantic nations and the security of our own backyard, but it is naive in the extreme to think that that means we can ignore insecurity and instability on Europe's southern flank in sub-Saharan Africa and the middle east.

The UK interest is threatened by violent extremism in the Sahel, the Lake Chad basin and the horn of Africa, and so too is it threatened by Russian proxies massing in Libya and Syria, but those are not problems that would be solved by 10,000 troops on the ground in any one of those places. The lessons of the last two decades show that we must work intelligently to tackle instability upstream and through regional partners. We simply cannot muscle our way to a solution in those places with all-out hard power. Our contribution on those conflicts in the future must be smarter and must develop a capability that will endure even after our mission is inevitably over.

We should also be clear that meeting our global trading ambitions requires both the capacity and the will to protect our sea lines of communication and the wider UK interests in the Indo-Pacific. The Opposition have wrongly characterised that as a switch in emphasis from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. Instead, it is a recognition that we have the capability, the capacity and the political will to flex hard power into a part of the world where the UK's strategic interest is growing quickly, so that we can strengthen our alliances, protect our interests and promote adherence to a rules-based international system.

The integrated review and the Defence Command Paper represent the boldest change in foreign, defence and security policy for 30 years, and it is entirely right that we are here debating them today. I know that there is disagreement on both sides of the House about some of the judgments that we have made, but the requirement is to produce a force that is credible: one that can actually fight in the complex and highly digitised battlespace of tomorrow. Some capabilities have run their course, and there can be no room for sentiment in keeping them when they simply are not relevant any more.

Ultimately, this all comes down to two key questions: first, are we offering the men and women of our armed forces exciting opportunities and the equipment they

deserve; and secondly, and most important, does all this make the UK safer? I have already looked servicemen and women in the eye and explained to them our vision for our armed forces and the way they will operate, and so too have my ministerial colleagues and the senior military leaderships of all three services. Our people get this: they understand the need for change, and they want it. The reality is that they can see, and I can see, that because of this transformation, our armed forces will be stronger, more capable and therefore better able to protect our country in the decades ahead.

4.47 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP) [V]: I join the Minister and the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), in paying tribute to the Duke of Edinburgh. I pass on my condolences and those of my party to the royal family, and to those in the armed forces for whom he has undoubtedly been an inspiration, having left behind such a long and distinguished career as a member of the forces. As the Minister rightly says, they will be preparing to give the late Duke of Edinburgh the send-off he rightly deserves, and we wish the armed forces the best in their preparations for that.

Like the shadow Secretary of State, I think it would be normal to decry the fact that the Secretary of State has not responded at the Dispatch Box, but I too entirely understand why he has to be at the NATO meeting on Ukraine. It is worth pausing to reflect on the fact that here we sit, in the north-west corner of Europe, in relative peace, while an ally in the south-east corner of Europe, already annexed and at war, faces a further military build-up on its border. The Scottish National party supports entirely Ukraine's right to its territorial integrity.

In every defence session we have had—whether Question Time, debates or a statement—all Members across the House have rightly thanked the members of the armed forces who have done so much for us during the pandemic in terms of resilience and, not least in more recent times, the roll-out of the vaccine, which we are all desperate to receive. They have put in some shift, as we would say in Scotland. It is curious that the Government have seen fit to thank the armed forces by telling them that they are going cut up to 10,000 places.

The context here is important, and not just that of the pandemic. Madam Deputy Speaker, you will know—not just as a keen watcher of political events in Scotland, but as a proud Scot yourself—that when it comes to the size of the armed forces, and in particular the things the Government say about them, many promises are made to Scots. That has been the case for quite a few years now, and each and every time, this Conservative Government renege on them. I have mentioned that many times before and I am afraid I am about to do so again.

As the Minister and the Government have confirmed—the Minister reiterated it today—that the cut will go ahead, may I ask the Government to outline to the House, if not today then at some point, and to the people of Scotland, to whom those promises were made, what the impact on the personnel footprint in Scotland will look like? Prior to the independence vote a few years ago, we were promised the permanent stationing of 12,500 Regular troops in Scotland. The Government have never come close to meeting that promise and that

target, and it is now obvious that they have no intention of ever trying to, so what will the permanent footprint look like after the cut of up to 10,000 troops is realised?

More broadly on context, it is curious and entirely objectionable as far as I am concerned that the Government would announce such a cut in conventional capability—not just in personnel, but in many of the platforms the shadow Secretary of State mentioned—when they announced their intention to allow an increase in the nuclear weapons stockpile. Now, we could probably have an entire debate on that one issue, but given that this debate is about the armed forces, let me just say this. I am with the Chair of the Defence Committee, whose analysis was spot on. He and I do not agree on the nuclear deterrent and its presence, but he described that increase as an attempt to deflect attention from—indeed, it is a sweetener to allies to cover up for it—the fact that we are having such grave cuts in conventional capability. That is fooling no one.

I plead with the Government to drop the fallacy of trying to play one capability against the other. It is important that we invest in cyber, of course. The new threats that the Minister outlined are real and the Government have our support in trying to meet them, but the shadow Secretary of State was also right: people keep the peace, people deliver resilience, and people put covid jabs into arms—not drones, and certainly not nuclear weapons.

It is curious to see the Government now framing this as though those of us who are against the cuts are somehow old fashioned, and are incapable of assessing modern-day threats and developing an argument on how to meet them. The Minister said earlier that we must not—I think this was the phrase—play “military bingo” when it comes to developing the capabilities needed to meet the threats faced. Well, if it is a game of bingo, like the shadow Secretary of State I would like to read some words from the caller, and the caller is the Prime Minister. During the last election, he said that

“we will not be cutting our armed services in any form.”

During the last general election, he also said:

“We will be maintaining the size of the armed services”.

Why did he say that if he had no intention of delivering? Why did he say it if he knew it would not come to pass? Indeed, the Government have developed that habit when it comes to promises on troop numbers. As I said at the start of my speech, is it not curious that this is how we thank our armed forces after the year they have had, committing themselves to fighting the pandemic?

It is also worth noting that, just after that Defence Command Paper came out, we learned via the media—not via a statement to Parliament or anything we could read in the integrated review paper or its associated documents—that the Office for Veterans' Affairs is to see a budget cut of up to 40%. It already has a tiny budget—of, I think, around £5 million—and it will be cut. That happened in the same week as the announcement, so why did not one single Minister from a Government who claim to be on the side of veterans come to announce that funding cut to the House? It is also worth noting that that announcement—or the news of the cut, rather, because there was no announcement—came in the same week that the Scottish Government announced that they would spend an extra £1 million on support for veterans who find themselves in Scotland.

The Government should cancel the planned cut in troops, and if that costs more money, so be it. Spend it, invest it. We could come up with a million ways in which the MOD could spend its money better, but I have always said to the Government that when they need more cash from Treasury Ministers and when that is sensible, they would have our support. Indeed, they would have the support of many around the House who do not think that this is a wise way to proceed.

We have talked a lot about how we treat the armed forces, and there is a lot of cross-party agreement on that, but amazingly, we cannot seem to get the Government to act. One thing we should do first is prise from the recruitment process the claws that Capita has sunk in so deeply. It is an expensive mess that does nothing for recruitment. The best people to do recruitment are the members of the armed forces themselves, not the shareholders of Capita, who are growing fat on a failing recruitment system.

Let us have a commission to look at pay and conditions. We know from recent National Audit Office reports that only 45% of serving personnel have any sense of job satisfaction—a staggeringly low figure. We also know that less than half of those living in armed services accommodation are happy with that accommodation. How can it be beyond the wit of the Government or the House to get those two things fixed? We have proposed in the past, and I propose it again today—I am sure you will remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill on the subject published in the last Parliament by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes)—the introduction of an armed forces representative body that could be placed on a statutory footing and represent the interests of members of the armed forces to the Government when it comes to pay and conditions. At the moment, they have no such body. They rely on Members of Parliament so to do, and with satisfaction figures as low as they are, the answer clearly does not lie in lobbying MPs whom the Government are ignoring.

It is right that we are having a debate on the specific issue of cuts in the number of members of the armed forces and in other conventional capabilities. We will have plenty of time to dive into some of the other issues in the integrated review, I am sure. As I made clear when the Secretary of State came to the House for the publication of the Defence Command Paper, there is much in there that we understand and indeed support, but there are some things that we do not and cannot support. Such egregious cuts to conventional capability, especially service personnel, are something we cannot support.

When the Minister winds up, I wonder whether he would clarify two things. First, as the Government seek to pivot, in addition to their geographic pivot to the Indo-Pacific region, and to place more emphasis on cyber and on drones and other unmanned devices in theatres of conflict, and as they seek to do more to protect not just people, but data, which the Government rightly identify as an attack surface, where will be the proper democratic and human oversight? Where will be the ideas from Government on how we lead efforts internationally to design treaties and rules of engagement when it comes to cyber, the use of unmanned drones and the protection of data? That debate is woefully lacking. In fairness, it is lacking not just here but in the entire western democratic sphere. We have not heard

[*Stewart Malcolm McDonald*]

much from the Government about how they will seek to put that right, and I think it is incumbent on them to bring forward a strategy on those things.

Lastly, if you will allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker—this relates more to current events than necessarily to the subject of the debate—might I tease out from the Government a clarification with regard to Ukraine? The Secretary of State is at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council right now, and rightly so. Will the Government clarify whether he intends to give a statement to the House following that meeting, and will he clarify what implications, if any, the current escalation in tensions might have for Operation Orbital, which is ongoing in Ukraine with United Kingdom armed forces?

The Minister said that he was able to look members of the armed forces in the eye and convince them of the merits of cutting jobs and places among them. That is good for him, but he still has a job to do in convincing voters—voters to whom he and his Government made promises, not just in the general election in 2019, but all those years ago ahead of the independence referendum. I am not sure he could look voters in the eye with the same degree of confidence that he came to the House and espoused today. I am afraid this is just one more example of Scotland's security being ill served by a Government who do not place high regard on their own interests.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We now have a formal time limit of four minutes. I call the Chairman of the Defence Committee, Tobias Ellwood.

5.1 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I will not tire of saying this, but I feel there is a 1930s feel to the world today. The threat picture continues to grow, diversify and become more complex. We live in extremely dangerous times, and the integrated review confirms that—as did the Prime Minister when he answered questions at the Liaison Committee recently. Russia and China will continue to become more assertive; democracy will continue to decline across the world; the new domains of cyber and space pose ever greater challenges to our security, as does the threat from terrorism, not just in the middle east but now in Afghanistan and Africa; and the wider consequences of climate change will only grow.

During the cold war, defence spending was at 4% of GDP. Few would disagree that the threats today are different, but they are arguably more dangerous and more unpredictable, yet we remain on a peacetime budget of just 2.2%. It is simply impossible for the MOD to meet all the obligations spelled out in the integrated review, hence the sweeping cuts that are now taking place across our defence capabilities, something that has not gone unnoticed by either our allies or our adversaries.

The new US Defence Secretary will shortly be in town. I am sure that No. 10 will gloss over General Austin's decision to visit Berlin and Brussels before London. We should read the signals: our special relationship requires work. General Austin's public message in London is likely to be: "Well done on the integrated review. We like the global Britain thing and we welcome your investment in special forces, cyber and space resilience." But in private, he will be more candid and is likely to say

something very different: "Your Navy is now too small. Don't cut your tanks, armoured fighting vehicles and 10,000 troops; you might be needing them sooner than you think. And please don't reduce the F-35 order from 138 originally down to 48." Why? Because the next decade is going to become very busy indeed.

Indeed, look at what the integrated review tries to achieve—help shape the international world order and deploy UK soft power; be a force for good for human rights; tilt to the Indo-Pacific; step up in Africa and the Gulf; lead NATO in Europe; stand up to China's competition and Russia's aggression, and create a space force and invest in cyber resilience. That is a formidable charge that we simply cannot achieve under a peacetime defence budget of just 2%, so I have huge sympathy with my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces, who is in the invidious position of having to make such tough decisions. We have heard about the impact: cuts to our frigates, with capability gaps because the replacement equipment is not ready in time, and similar effects on our land warfare capability and the RAF.

However we look at it, this is a dramatic cut in our conventional defence posture that will limit the UK's options in stepping forward to assist in conflict prevention, stabilisation, peacekeeping and nation-building skills—things that we have been so good at in the past. I make it very clear that the real threat will come from China—not directly through going to war, but through our being nudged out from favoured nation status across the world. We need to re-engage with our allies, and that requires force presence and upstream engagement. We can do it only with the kind of hard power and the size of force that we had during the cold war.

5.5 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) [V]: May I place on record my sympathy for the family of Cheryl Gillan, our colleague? She was not in my political party, but she was somebody whom I both liked and respected.

Today's debate is very important; I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) for introducing it from the Front Bench. The Minister for the Armed Forces was absolutely wrong to pose it as technology versus the size of our armed forces. That is the wrong calculation to make. It is not about sentimentality, for those of us who have had the opportunity to see our armed forces in operation around the world, in conflict zones and in peacekeeping roles. They do a magnificent job—pound for pound, they are probably among the very best-trained and best operational armed forces on this planet—but they need numbers. We saw that in places such as Sierra Leone, where the numbers of people mattered. We saw it with the rotation of troops in Afghanistan, when our troops came back tired from their tours of duty—too tired, on some occasions. We need numbers there.

To pose the question as being about numbers of Army personnel versus technology is simply wrong. Yes, of course we need investment in the technologies of the future, in cyber, in space and in deep ocean activities, but that does not preclude the need for numbers in our armed forces. The significant reduction that my right hon. Friend pointed out—some 35,000 fewer personnel in our Army by the end of the process—is difficult to comprehend, because it means that we will end up making hard choices.

I put it to the Minister: will those hard choices mean that we cannot engage in a Sierra Leone of the future? Will they mean that our armed forces cannot fill the £17 billion-plus equipment deficit or go into conflict zones properly equipped? Those would be unacceptable hard choices. Will they mean that in future, because of our lack of personnel, we cannot do things we ought to do? As the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) said, they are choices that we simply should not be making in this period of enormous uncertainty around the world. I appeal to the Minister to appeal in turn to his Government colleagues to think very hard about these cuts.

At the height of the cold war and as we began to come out of it, one thing we learned was that making the world secure for our armed forces was also making it secure for those whom we saw as our adversaries. President Biden has offered President Putin a summit. I have no truck with President Putin and the malign way in which he operates his Government, but we do have to talk. We have to begin to see whether there is any capacity—there may not be—to revive the treaties on conventional forces in Europe and on nuclear deployments.

In the end, making the world a safer place, at least in those areas of activity, will make a material difference in easing some of the pressures on our armed forces and what they do. That is not a pipe dream and it is not pious; it is common sense to say, “Yes, we need the right numbers in our armed forces and we need technologies, but we also need to work to create a safer and better world.”

5.10 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I warmly endorse what the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) just said about our late, dear colleague Cheryl Gillan?

It is often said, in the military context, that quantity has a quality all its own. That is perfectly true, but it does not mean that the strength of the armed forces should be measured by their size alone. A revolutionary advance in military technology in the hands of a few can defeat almost any number of assailants; think of the Somme and the mass slaughter of troops by limited numbers of machine guns with interlocking fields of fire—only other new technologies eventually broke that dreadful stalemate. After the end of the cold war, the threat picture finally shifted away from Europe and towards expeditionary warfare, based on carrier-strike, which is air power from the sea, and amphibious capability, which is land power from the sea. Such traditional technologies are still essential for those sorts of campaigns against opponents who are no match for us militarily. Yet against advanced peer opponents armed with hypersonic anti-ship missiles, for example, traditional assets such as surface ships are potentially very vulnerable. As we know, the pendulum has now swung back from countering insurgencies and their sponsors to state-on-state confrontation with major military powers.

As has been pointed out, at the root of our defence dilemma is one inescapable limitation: between 1988 and 2018, defence expenditure halved as a proportion of GDP. The most welcome pledge of an extra £16.4 billion spread over a four-year period should fill a “black hole” in the equipment budget and facilitate investment in critical new areas of technology. What it will not do, sadly, is prevent serious cuts in conventional armed

forces. An estimated 2.2% or 2.3% of GDP defence budget is well short of the 3% recommended by Defence Committees past and present, let alone the 4.5% and above regularly allocated during the cold war years. Yet, even if all our dreams came true on the size of the defence budget, we would still be at the mercy of nuclear blackmail and attack if we had not voted in July 2016 to proceed with the renewal of the Trident missile submarine fleet. Given that the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), a former Labour leader, and I have debated such matters good-naturedly for more than 20 years and he is up next, let me conclude with reference to the Government’s announcement that they will no longer reduce the total of our nuclear warheads from a maximum of 225 to a maximum of 180 by the mid-2020s. Instead, they will set a new overall ceiling of 260. This is predictably being denounced as a 40% increase; but the cancellation of a reduction is not an increase. Most probably, it is a recognition that advances in anti-ballistic missile technology might tempt an aggressor to think—probably mistakenly—that he could avoid a devastating response. Why, then, raise the theoretical maximum from 225 to 260? The Government have not said so, but my guess is that it is to cover any temporary overlap when the current generation of UK warheads are replaced by their successors. We have always followed a policy of minimum strategic deterrence, and long may we continue to keep ourselves safe by doing so.

5.14 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind) [V]: This is an important and obviously very timely debate—timely because of the Government’s review of security needs for the future, and because of the vote in the other place last night on the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill. The Government were defeated over issues of ensuring that our political system, our Ministry of Defence, are held to account when allegations of serious offences such as torture or genocide are made against any British forces. We should never put ourselves above the law and should surely support international law, which is what all Governments have said they absolutely do.

The review that has just taken place seems to miss out a number of very important things. But the headline figure was the one about nuclear weapons. Contrary to what the previous speaker has just said, there is an increase in the number of nuclear warheads, which will go up to 260. That is contrary to our obligations under article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, originally conceived by the Labour Government of the 1960s.

As one of the declared nuclear weapons states, we are required to take steps towards nuclear disarmament. The Government are proposing to move in absolutely the opposite direction—not just by increasing the capacity, the number of warheads and their firepower, but apparently by changing the strategic basis on which they may be deployed. They seem to be moving away from the “no first use” concept towards using them as a threat—or rather, when they believe there is a threat that has to be met.

Surely we ought to be joining the rest of the world in seeking a global ban of all nuclear weapons, rather than this huge expenditure on weapons that everyone obviously hopes will never be used and that, in effect, do not provide us with any credible form of defence on the real security issues that we face at present.

[*Jeremy Corbyn*]

The coronavirus crisis has shown us how dangerous this world is when it comes to contagious diseases and when it is so divided by the poverty of the majority of the populations of the planet against the minority—and, of course, environmental disaster is coming down the line. Surely we need a strategic approach that deals with those issues—one that protects us from cyber-attacks, obviously, and ensures that we look at the causes of war and that we do not cut overseas aid expenditure but instead increase it, where appropriate, to improve developments around the world and cut down on the enormous gap between the world's richest and poorest. Because the motor behind the conflicts of the past 30 years has often been human rights abuses, political instability and a fight for resources all around the world.

The last thing I shall say in the few seconds I have left is that instead of reducing the numbers of uniformed servicepeople, as we are, we should be looking at their pay, conditions and treatment over the past 10 years and recognising the enormous work that they have done in peacekeeping operations, as others have pointed out, as well as dealing with crises such as the Ebola outbreak in west Africa, where they performed heroically. Surely real strategic thinking is about making the world a more peaceful and safer place.

5.18 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Defence reviews and the subsequent spending priorities are not abstract events but relate to identifiable threats. Today the most serious threat to British and European security is posed by Russia. With the main aims of its modernisation programme over the past decade largely met, and with a sophisticated and ruthless cyber-capability and a huge nuclear arsenal, Russia is militarily stronger today than it has been for many years. Just as importantly, with its intervention to support the Assad regime in Syria, its continued occupation of Georgian sovereign territory and the brutal and illegal annexation of Crimea, with its continued threat to the security and sovereignty of Ukraine, there can be little doubt about the Kremlin's willingness to deploy its military strength in pursuit of its national agenda.

If, in the face of that threat, we are to have a nuclear deterrent, as I believe we must, it must be credible. The increase in the warhead cap to 260 needs to be seen in the context of the French having declared numbers of around 300, the United States 3,800 and Russia some 6,800. I congratulate the Defence Secretary and his ministerial team on having the courage to take this decision.

Russia's gangster regime under Vladimir Putin has poisoned and murdered opponents on its own territory and overseas, including on UK soil. It carries out a range of hostile activities, including information warfare and cyber-attacks aimed at democratic western states. In July, the United States, Britain and Canada accused a Russian hacking group linked to Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service of trying to steal covid-19 vaccine research. So it is right that we increase investment in our own cyber-capability. However, cyber-attacks are the tip of the iceberg in Russia's persistent attempts to penetrate western security, institutions and infrastructure, and it is sadly aided and abetted in some of its strategy by the policy of some of our own allies. I refer in particular to

the German attitude towards the Nord Stream 2 project. That pipeline is a Russian geopolitical project intended to divide Europe and weaken European energy security. As President Biden put it, Nord Stream 2 is "a bad idea" for Germany, for Ukraine, and for our central and eastern European allies and partners.

We face many other Russian threats, including to undersea cables, that we simply do not have time to consider today, but the most urgent is the continued Russian aggression towards Ukraine. Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, which was planned in advance, resulted in around 10,000 fatalities and over 23,000 people wounded, according to the UN. Over 1.5 million residents of Crimea and Donbass are now internally displaced persons after being compelled to leave their homes—and this on the edge of Europe. Today, large Russian military movements towards the eastern Ukraine border have been widely reported, including the movements of Iskander short-range missiles.

We must act with our allies now to stop Russian aggression before the situation spins out of control, as it so easily could. That is what our political, economic and military strength is for; that is what the Government's priority must be.

5.21 pm

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): First, may we record that on this day 70 years ago the great trade union leader, Labour Foreign Secretary and patriot Ernest Bevin died? Along with Prime Minister Clement Attlee, he created NATO, the Marshall plan and Britain's independent nuclear deterrent—all, of course, opposed at the time by the ultra-left, in and out of the Labour party. That is why it was so welcome today that the speech introducing the motion was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), getting back to those Labour values, not ultra-left communist and Trotskyist delusions but real Labour values—supporting the defence of our country, demanding proper wages, conditions and equipment for our brave men and women in our armed forces, and supporting our own defence industry.

It is a shame that the Secretary of State is not here today, because frankly, his response to some of the criticisms recently has been rather petulant, and I was hoping we were going to get a reset back to a more reasoned debate. We do, of course, understand why he is not here—because of the crisis in Ukraine. Russia, in full soviet mode, is massing armour on the borders of Ukraine, having previously undertaken similar exercises on the frontiers with the Baltic states, and a massive re-equipment and militarisation of Kaliningrad. We also have to recognise, in some of those esoteric arguments that take place about quality versus quantity—we had some of that from the Minister—that mass has a quality of its own, and therefore we undermine that at our peril.

Yet in the face of this, the Government are running down our defences, both in armour and by cutting the number of troops, and also in other platforms, as was rightly identified by the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox). At the same time, we have to recognise that previous Conservative Governments have had form in this respect. In the interwar period, the 10-year rule of anticipating no conflict in 10 years, driven by the Treasury, ran down our defences. That not only reduced our equipment and the number of troops,

but sent a message that we lacked resolve, so we were lacking resources and resolve. Under Options for Change, we had a massive rundown of our forces. Soldiers were actually made redundant—an appalling problem, which took a long while to redress.

The removal of HMS Endurance from the Falklands—the withdrawal of resources—sent a very clear signal to the Argentine junta that we lacked resolve, and we know the consequences of that. We had the withdrawal from Germany. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) and I pointed out to Ministers at the time that they would not save any money, and now they are having to go back there. They are taking the forces for granted and running down their facilities.

We all recognise the need to review the increasing requirements for operating in the grey zone and for tackling challenges in cyber-space, but in the earlier stages of the review it was posited that changes had to be cash-neutral, so that dealing with those problems had to be at the expense of conventional military capability and of upgrading. That was a mistake and it should be redressed now.

5.25 pm

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I very much share the concerns expressed by the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), but I very much hope that we maintain minimum recoverable capability in all these fields, because the new capabilities that have been brought in by the integrated review are equally or more important than the reductions in the overall size of the armed forces that we have seen. The big surprise in the review was the announcement of the increase in the warhead cap.

I want to reply very directly to the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). May I remind him that, on 18 July 2016, when he was leader of the Labour party, the Government got through the House the main gate of the renewal of the Trident submarines on a vote of 472 to 117? There is no doubt, therefore, that the strength of consensus in this House does not reflect the views of the then leader of the Labour party.

John Spellar: The hon. Gentleman will recall that that vote was taken about five years later than it should have been because of dithering by his own Government.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I think the coalition had something to do with that. I warned David Cameron about that before we even went into that coalition.

The right hon. Member for Islington North accuses his own country of proliferating weapons of mass destruction, and suggests that we are somehow escalating our numbers, but he does not even mention the fact that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said, Russia has—what was it?—6,800 nuclear warheads. They are modernising every single weapons system that they have got. They are in breach of the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty. That is escalation, and the right hon. Member for Islington North has nothing to say about that whatsoever.

We all know that the British people will support the United Kingdom's continuous at-sea deterrent for as long as other nuclear weapons states are keeping their weapons and there are other proliferators around. We

just need to remind ourselves what extraordinarily good value the continuous at-sea deterrent system actually is. The Library produced a report last month, pointing out that the annual cost of our continuous at-sea deterrent is just 1% of the cost of social security and tax credits—just 1%. So the idea that this is a Rolls-Royce system that we cannot afford is mythical. Nothing could buy us the security and influence that the continuous at-sea deterrent gives us.

The doctrine of deterrence is just as valid as it ever was. Has the right hon. Member for Islington North ever asked himself why major state-on-state warfare stopped in 1945? Well, I can tell him why: it was because nuclear weapons were invented and that kind of warfare became too costly, too destructive, to contemplate. Does he want to go back to that world by getting rid of nuclear weapons altogether? I hope not.

We just need to remind ourselves that our continuous at-sea deterrent can attack any target at any time, so it is always ready to respond to threats. Its location is unknown so it cannot be pre-empted. It does not require to be deployed at a time of international tension and crisis. The technology is tried and tested. It is not in breach of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty; it is completely compliant. It is a sovereign capability, which, if we had to use it, we would. No alternative system could possibly provide all these benefits at such good value, and that is why we should reaffirm our commitment to our nuclear deterrent.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We now go by video link to Marie Rimmer, with a time limit of three minutes.

5.30 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab) [V]: The British military is currently engaged in its biggest ever—[*Inaudible.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We cannot hear the hon. Lady. Shall we try audio only?

Ms Rimmer: [*Inaudible.*—proving once again that they are the ultimate emergency service.—[*Inaudible.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we will try to come back to the hon. Lady later, because the sound quality means that we cannot hear what she is saying.

5.32 pm

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): The additional £24 billion in the defence resource needs to be recognised and comes after a number of years of challenging Budgets, not forgetting the £30 billion black hole legacy left in 2010. Along with the Defence Command Paper, it serves the vital need to respond to the ever-changing threats, ensuring a stronger and more secure Union. As a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I can confirm that it has been received very positively by our international allies.

The motion tabled by Labour expresses concern about the size of the Army. Having listened closely to the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), I would say that

[*Alun Cairns*]

he can play his part, too, if he is genuinely committed in his support. I want to bring the House's attention to a very local difficulty that the MOD is having in securing the long-term future of the St Athan base in my constituency. The Welsh Government are the landowners and have refused to extend the lease, in favour of a business park.

I ask Labour Members to influence their colleagues in the Welsh Government with regard to supporting the MOD's plans to house a major Army unit at the site. I am concerned that the Welsh Government do not show the same interest in defence as the right hon. Gentleman does, and I ask for his help. The right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) talked about those on the left coming in and out of the Labour party, but it seems that they are alive and kicking in Wales.

The site has been subject to several initiatives. All have failed to materialise. The Red Dragon hangar, completed in 2005 at a cost of £113 million, for maintaining fast jets, was abandoned immediately on construction. The multibillion-pound private finance initiative tri-service technical academy was later cancelled on value-for-money grounds. Several plans to base a number of major Army units there have failed to materialise. To give credit to each Secretary of State since 2010, they have recognised the need to secure the future of that. The defence estate review in 2016 identified St Athan as their key site in Wales. The Welsh Government refused to extend the lease and anyone with local knowledge will know that the alternative sites suggested are wholly unsuitable. The result is that unless the Welsh Government negotiate with a common goal, the future of this base is precarious.

I wanted to get this situation on the record because I am concerned about the serious risks to the St Athan base. The site is hugely valuable to the armed forces and to the community that it is keen to support. In that spirit, I ask the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne, and his team to influence the Welsh Government. If they do that, they will, at the same time, improve the footprint of the Army and underline the fact that all parts of the UK play a prominent role in securing our Union.

5.34 pm

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab) [V]: Our withdrawal from the EU, the rise of China and the threat posed by Russia has meant that the strategic context in which our armed forces operate has shifted hugely in the decade since I left. The professionalism, resilience and adaptability of those who still serve has not. The Defence Command Paper rightly describes our servicemen and women as "our finest asset". It is therefore incongruous for the Government to be stripping back the British Army to a level not seen for 300 years.

While the number of service personnel is set to reduce, it appears that what they are expected to achieve will not. The integrated review does not suggest that we will draw down on any of our commitments. The UK will remain the leading European partner in NATO and maintain our responsibilities in the middle east and Africa, while at the same time expanding our role in the Indo-Pacific. In my experience, trying to do more with less rarely works. When the Prime Minister pledged to maintain the size of our armed forces, he was right to do so. We are now being told that size no longer matters because

the threat has changed, but as I put to the Secretary of State last month, if the threat has changed so much, so quickly, what is to say that it will not change again? In response, I was told that any future proposals to increase manning would be supported, but of course, it is not that simple.

Retaining talent is far easier and more inexpensive than recruiting it—a principle that is especially true when applied to our service personnel. We would do well to remember that technology evolves; the one thing that remains constant is people. We should also remember that our people are among the very best in the world. They are our ultimate insurance policy. Recent history is littered with examples, from Vietnam to Afghanistan, when technological superiority did not bring about success. Kit and equipment will never be an adequate substitute for strategy and leadership.

To conclude, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, leaders and experts predicted a new period of global peace and prosperity that never materialised. Thirty years on, the world is now more complex, more dangerous and more unpredictable. No one can say with any confidence what it will look like in another 30 years. We live in uncertain times. There are no easy answers, only difficult questions, but now more than ever, Britain must aspire to show leadership. Cutting the one thing that, above all else, gives us our edge—our people—will be to the detriment of our national security and our standing in the world. This decision is short-sighted—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We have to leave it there; I am sorry, Dan. We will now return to Marie Rimmer.

5.37 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab) [V]: The British military are currently engaged in their biggest ever homeland military operation in peacetime: the battle against covid-19. For the past 12 months, they have set up testing sites and vaccine centres and even administered the jabs themselves. Our armed forces have proven once again that they are our ultimate emergency service. I do not wish to pre-empt the inquiry into the covid-19 crisis, but I imagine that there will be a lot of praise for our armed forces. They are logistics and crisis experts—the best we have as a nation. The Government should always draw on this expertise, yet under the defence review, numbers are being cut. Not only are the Government reducing numbers; they are giving our troops a real-terms pay cut.

Since 2010, our armed forces have been reduced by 45,000. The recent defence review cuts come on top of this decade of decline. The size of the Army will be at its smallest since 1714, despite our population being 10 times bigger than it was then. The Prime Minister and Defence Secretary have laid out their reasoning for these cuts. I support modernising our forces, particularly the investment in cyber, and I am glad that the new centre will be based in the north-west, but we do not need to do these modernisations at the expense of armed forces personnel. The Government can invest in future technologies while maintaining the size of our Army. The Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and all Government Members stood on a manifesto that committed to not cutting the armed forces in any form, but, quite frankly, what was the point? Promises and commitments are broken on a regular basis.

The world is a dangerous place: Russia has amassed close to 100,000 troops on the border with Ukraine; Myanmar is under military rule and innocent citizens are being butchered by the state; China is becoming increasingly bullish towards its neighbours; and the covid-19 crisis and economic woes that go with it have the potential to topple democracies. Maintaining armed forces numbers is essential to our security at home and abroad.

Retired British generals have said that further Army cuts mean that the UK is no longer taken seriously as a military power, and that it would damage our relationship with the US and our position in NATO. Worse still, Lord Richards—former Chief of the Defence Staff—has warned that we almost certainly would not be able to retake the Falklands or prevent genocide like we did in Kosovo.

The next pandemic or crisis that our nation faces could be much worse. The Government should not abandon expertise when we do not know what is around the corner. Now is—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry Marie; we have to leave it there.

5.40 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): It is galling that time and again we hear from the Secretary of State and his Ministers that our people—our forces personnel—are our best asset, yet when there is an opportunity to look after them, the Government cut and freeze their pay, deplete their numbers, and neglect their mental and physical health needs as well as their housing and welfare needs.

The cuts to our Army, Navy and Air Force come at a time of increasing global instability, emerging threats and increasing risks on the back of a decade of decline. There is an urgent need for strong defence, strong strategic direction and strong relationships with our allies—all of which this Government are failing on. Cuts are weakening our defences. The integrated review has rightly been derided by many as contradictory and incoherent, and this Government's actions are distancing us from our allies. I completely understand the need for us to invest in cyber and new technologies because warfare is always changing. But in this ever-changing landscape, the one constant in warfare throughout history has been—and always will be—our brave forces personnel. To diminish their numbers would be a grave mistake. After all, it is people who will be needed to operate and monitor these new technologies. If not, the technology will be more susceptible to attacks. This is not sentimentality; it is plain fact.

Just yesterday in the Defence Committee, we heard that the integrated review's promise of identifying, developing and deploying these new technologies and capabilities faster than our potential adversaries is unrealistic, because, as one of our witnesses stated, they "do not see" from this Government

"the pace and level of investment to live that statement".

We have a Government who have not acted with sufficient pace regarding emerging technologies and cyber at the same time as they have depleted our existing capabilities, leaving us dangerously vulnerable.

Cuts do not strengthen our defence capabilities. Unclear direction does not strengthen our defence capabilities. Acting in ways that increasingly distance us from our allies does not strengthen our defence capabilities. Our forces' strength lies in their people. That is why we are

asking Members on the Government Benches to show today that they share our unwavering respect for and value our forces personnel just as much as we on the Opposition Benches do.

5.43 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): I welcome today's debate, but I want Members in this Chamber, particularly on the Opposition Benches, to remember that it was the Labour party—MPs sat on the Opposition Benches, including the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition—that wanted to make the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) Prime Minister, so no doubt those Members supported his world view. It was a world view that included abolishing the Army, scrapping Trident, withdrawing from NATO and casting doubt on our world-leading intelligence services.

Ironically, we have heard something different today from the shadow Secretary of State, who is much more positive about the armed forces. I really welcome that, but one of his colleagues on the Front Bench wanted to replace our armed forces with human security services, which would have made our defence policy not a statement of intent, but quite literally just a written statement. I cannot stress enough how important the safety and security of the United Kingdom and our people are. I pay tribute to the hard work of our armed forces, which keep us safe every day.

History has demonstrated that where we do not meet the changing nature of security with equal, robust and pragmatic changes in policy, we leave ourselves vulnerable and open to attack. In the current climate, must we consider not only the threat of newly emerging powers, requiring nuclear weapons, but that of non-state actors, who have shown their intention to cause atrocities on our streets. We must consider the changing nature of these demands. We must adapt to this change. We must ensure that our constituents are kept safe.

I welcome this Government's commitment to spend £188 billion on defence over the next four years. It shows commitment and that we are protecting our people. We are building new ships for our Navy and new jets for our RAF. The funding will enable the Ministry of Defence to prioritise more than £6.6 billion for research on those new threats. We do not want our armed forces to be technologically disadvantaged. We want to build partnerships that sustain our economic advantage, our strategic advantage and our defence advantage. Right across the United Kingdom, our communities are benefiting from billions of pounds-worth of defence spending. Across this nation, I am proud that our investment in MOD spending is supporting more than 400,000 jobs and providing huge opportunities across British industry for our future.

It is only this party—the Conservative party—that can be trusted to keep our country and our people safe, and I pay tribute to this Government under my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary. They have reaffirmed our commitment. This Government are committed to ensuring that our armed forces have the strength to protect our country.

5.46 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): In 1962, Dean Acheson, the former Secretary of State, said:

"Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role."

[Mr Kevan Jones]

In the 1960s, we concentrated our efforts in defence and foreign policy on protecting western Europe during the cold war and on our commitments to NATO. The integrated review was billed as a way of the Government defining what was meant by global Britain. The review is ambitious, but in a lot of ways, it looks backwards to an age with a certain amount of sentimentality and a rose-tinted view of Britain's place in the world, without the resources to meet the ambition it outlines. In the maritime space, for example, we have a situation where global Britain is going to be projected by only 19 capital ships, and possibly fewer than that, throughout the mid-2020s. In order to have credibility, global Britain will also conduct operations in areas of the world in which we have never done operations before. We cannot do that without resources and without the people to do that.

I just ask the Government to be honest with the British people. If this integrated review is to be enacted, it needs the resources behind it, but I am concerned that in the race for the Government to meet this nostalgic view of Britain's place in the world, they will take their eye off the real ball, which is our commitment to NATO and the north Atlantic and the main threat, which everyone agrees is there today—we have seen it today in Ukraine—which is from Russia. We cannot do that without the resources or the people.

Given this Government's track record in coalition and in Government, the integrated review did not come from a standing start; it was from a start that has seen cuts to the defence budget that mean it is 5% lower than it was in real terms in 2010.

I will finish by saying this: we are all proud of our men and women in our armed forces, but we should not make them empty promises that we cannot deliver. We certainly should not have a situation where we ask them to do things without the resources and the capabilities that they rightly deserve.

5.48 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con) [V]: The strength of our armed forces does not just rest in the capability of our military hardware. It relies on the skills, dedication and years of experience gained through the training and deployment of the men and women of the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force. We do not just need to recruit enough of them to serve in our battleships, armoured personnel carriers and aircraft; we need to retain them for long enough to benefit from the experience and training, which in the case of highly skilled personnel, will have cost millions.

Those brave men and women love their country and the jobs they do to protect us and keep us all free, but they have families who are often massively impacted by the work they do. While service families take enormous pride in the work of their serving family members, it also the case that military personnel put their families through more separation, relocation and danger than any other public servant.

On top of that, when we add into the mix accommodation that is not always of the standard it should be, disruption to children's education, health services that do not keep up with their frequent moves and the inability of their spouse or partner to keep their job as the result of frequent relocation, many service

personnel, although wanting to stay in the armed forces, are not prepared to continue to put their families through those difficulties, so they leave, taking all their experience with them and often leaving major capability gaps as a result.

That is why I was so delighted to be asked by a previous Secretary of State for Defence to write a report on what could be done to improve life for armed forces families. Professor Walker, Dr Misca and I published the report, "Living in our Shoes", last summer, with 110 recommendations. I am delighted that, at the end of last month, the Government accepted 86 of them in full and 20 of them in part, while only rejecting three, with one being for the armed forces charitable sector to respond to. The report and the Government response are both on gov.uk.

Overall, we called for the whole nation to take its responsibilities to the armed forces families more seriously, and we called for the Prime Minister to make the care and wellbeing of armed forces families a national priority. I am delighted that the Government have accepted that challenge—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I am terribly sorry, but time is up.

5.51 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I want to make two simple points. The work done by the armed forces during the pandemic was welcomed by all of us. In my constituency, the same as in everyone else's, they did a great job on testing and vaccination, and I am deeply grateful. Talking to armed forces personnel, they told me how much they had enjoyed the work, and they felt they were fighting a real good battle against the virus. I also know, from my own limited service in the TA, that in armed forces life there is a lot of training and an awful lot of waiting, and doing something different can really make life a lot better. Indeed, the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), talked about the satisfaction of that. I also know that those armed forces personnel who helped rescue refugees found it very satisfying.

So my first point is this. In doing these jobs, the armed forces are actually indirectly saving other arms of Government spending money. I suspect—no, I am certain—that what is being suggested to us by the Government today is of course money-led. It is about the revenue budget. However, I would ask the Government to take a wider look at what is going on here, because I think what the armed forces are doing when they are not actually defending the country is saving other budgets.

In the time available, my second point is this. The shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), spoke of four Rs. There is a fifth R, which has been touched on, and it is recruitment, but I would like to look at it from a different angle. In my working life, and indeed more recently, I have had a close connection with the oil and gas industry, and one of the biggest problems the oil and gas industry faces is recruitment. Why? Because, unfairly or not, it is seen to be a sunset industry, and young people are not particularly interested in joining as they think there are better careers elsewhere. If we reduce the armed forces by the numbers being suggested,

we will take their number below a critical mass. That means people—the brightest and the best, the most capable, the fittest—who might otherwise think about joining our armed forces will think twice and go elsewhere. That would be a tragedy, and it would be the start of a downward spiral leading us on the high road to a very dark place indeed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members who are participating remotely to keep an eye on the clock and have an independent timer as well just to make sure, as it is a bit messy when I have to cut them off, but I will cut them off to get more Members in.

5.54 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I will endeavour not to be cut off.

It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, which has been very interesting. It is actually a very thoughtful motion that we are considering—much more so than some of the other Opposition day motions we have been used to considering of late. Maybe that is why it has had such a sympathetic hearing from so many of my hon. Friends. We only have to look at what is happening on the Ukrainian border to see that even today, despite all the advancements that we have in technology, mass still matters.

Yet I cannot support the motion, primarily because of the very last sentence where it talks about the Government's plans to reduce the capability of the armed forces. Unfortunately, that is simply not true. They are reducing the size—the overall manpower—of the armed forces but they are not reducing the capability. In fact, the £24.1 billion investment—the biggest increase in defence spending since the cold war—should be welcomed. The investment in new technologies and in accommodation, supporting forces' families, is also something that we should all welcome. It is especially welcome in Scotland, where the review and settlement cement the armed forces footprint north of the border, guaranteeing the presence of the armed forces on the Clyde, at Lossiemouth and elsewhere across the country, investing in our shipyards by placing orders for 20 warships to be built on the Clyde, and providing jobs across the country in our world-leading defence industry sector at companies such as Leonardo in Edinburgh, which is providing the UK-led future combat air system.

I thank the Opposition for putting forward a very thoughtful motion. This has indeed been a very interesting debate with good contributions from all sides. However, because of the simple truth that we are not reducing the capability of the armed forces, I cannot—

Bob Stewart: I am sorry to have to disagree with my very good friend. We are reducing the capability of our armed forces. We are reducing their capability to do peacekeeping, limited operations, counter-insurgency and peacemaking. We have not got the men to do it. That is what we are doing.

Andrew Bowie: I thank my right hon. and gallant Friend—my very good friend—for his intervention. I would never seek to disagree with him on matters of defence, but on this issue, although not wrong, I think that the investment that we are making in technology

will allow this country to be at the forefront of expanding our capabilities as a country in doing all the things that he spoke about, which we are very proud that our armed forces do for us and for our allies around the world. That is why I cannot support this motion.

5.57 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab) [V]: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this very important debate.

I wish to urge the reconsideration of the decision to cancel the Warrior capability sustainment programme. Doing so in favour of the German-manufactured Boxer will have a devastating impact on our nation, my constituents, and the men and women in our armed forces. It is crucial that we provide our armed forces with only the very best protection. The Warrior upgrade would have been a significantly enhanced fighting vehicle equipping British Army infantry soldiers to be supported in the most demanding of battlefield environments. The Warrior is the only vehicle specifically designed to provide fire support, and because of its new 40 mm cannon it boasts unique close combat capabilities. The Government must outline what capability trade-offs will be made with the transition to the Boxer and how this may affect our soldiers on the frontline.

Not only are our armed forces put at risk by the Government's decision, but our economy as well. The production of these armed vehicles would have brought an estimated £1 billion to the UK economy, with the supply chain being made up of 80% British companies. The contract itself would have secured nearly 2,000 jobs. The investment would have boosted the UK economy after covid-19. But instead these vehicles are now to be replaced by Boxer, which is produced by a German manufacturer. I am greatly concerned that this will not bring the same prosperity as Warrior would have done and will only result in a disastrous loss of income and job opportunities for the UK.

More locally, Lockheed Martin provides employment to about 900 skilled workers at its site in Ampthill, as well as offering apprenticeship opportunities to young engineers. The cancellation threatens the viability of this site. It has already been announced that up to 158 people will lose their jobs in the wake of the Government's decision. The skills lost owing to job losses in this sector will take many years to rebuild. The Warrior programme represented significant investment in some of the UK's best technology and it advances our capabilities as a military force. I am hugely disappointed by the cancellation of that programme. I am troubled by the damage that might do to our armed forces, the limits it could place on economic growth and the number of jobs at risk. I urge the Government to reconsider this appalling decision.

6 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I will focus, perhaps slightly unusually in the debate, on the impact of climate change on our national security and, therefore, the resource allocation in the MOD. We know that, so far, the world has not made climate action plans bold enough to limit global temperature growth to 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels. Obviously, we support the COP26 President, the right hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), on achieving that at COP26 later this year, but the reality is that climate change will affect

[Darren Jones]

our national security irrespective of whether we hit the 1.5° C target. That will translate into a number of issues, ranging from significant global climate migration and shortages of food and water to new conflicts around the world and, potentially, a vastly different geopolitical order.

On some projections, if global warming reaches 3° C we will have a world in which most of the United States, and indeed China, as well as other countries along and near to the equator, no longer survive in their current form due to desertification. Russia could become the largest food-producing country in the world. If we turn our minds to Russia's approach in leveraging oil and gas to meet political objectives, we can imagine what that would look like in a world in which Russia had a monopoly of fertile land for food production. The future management of the Antarctic, following the lapsing of the current treaty in 2041, and presumably with habitable land following the melting of the polar caps, would become a high-risk flashpoint in a desperate world. All those outcomes present risks to Britain's national security, the rules-based order and the allocation of our defences.

I wish to focus on the Arctic circle because melting caps produce newly navigable seas. For trade, shipping goods from China to Europe through the Arctic region, as opposed to through the Suez canal, would reduce shipping time, fuel consumption and cost. On security, only last week it was reported that Russia is further expanding its military presence in the polar region, testing air missiles and utilising nuclear submarines to break through ice, and is continuing to build military bases along its Arctic coastline.

On access to natural resources, many countries are trying to claim legal jurisdiction in the area, for drilling purposes. The integrated review says that we will seek to maintain high co-operation and low tension in the region, ensuring the safe, sustainable and responsible management of natural resources. Although I support those ideals, I fear the Government are not fully anticipating the escalation of tensions in our own neighbourhood, not least because so little reference is made to the Arctic circle in the integrated review.

That is, of course, an issue for Scottish independence, because England needs Scotland as much as Scotland needs England in being able to respond quickly to threats in the Greenland-Iceland UK entry point to the north Atlantic. I do not wish to be pessimistic, but I fear that all the climate change signs point to an escalation of risk and to tension in the Arctic circle, yet little attention is paid to that in the integrated review and defence statements, or indeed Government policy. I hope that those on the Treasury Bench might give us more insight to their thinking on the issue later this evening.

6.3 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): It is a great privilege to speak in this key debate, Mr Deputy Speaker, although the concept of strength of the armed forces happens to be a misnomer. First, military force will only ever be as good as the way in which it is deployed. The long asymmetric campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, were indicative of attrition, force protection

and technology, more so than outright military power, but times have changed, even over this short period, and as the integrated review has made clear, we are now fighting in an era of "persistent engagement" against multiple threats, on multiple fronts and in new domains. It might be that conventional force, far from being the historical solution it was, is now just a solution.

Secondly, the word "strength" is in itself confusing. It is often used to describe disposition or size, so I would agree with the Opposition's argument that our UK armed forces have shrunk, but that ignores the fact that "strength" can also mean availability of force, utility and, above all, potency. So, I would argue that reducing the size of our armed forces does not necessarily mean that the application of military force is any less credible. Let us be clear that the vast reduction in our armed forces since the second world war is not just a Conservative problem. It is something for which successive Governments must take responsibility.

I shall outline some facts if I may. In 2009, after over a decade of Labour government, there were 46,000 fewer service personnel than in 1997. Over the same period, the three services ended up 6,500 personnel short of the MOD's trained requirement, a figure that is larger than the delta today. The reality is that HM forces fell in size by at least a fifth under Blair and Brown.

Before I am accused of being blindly partisan, let us not forget that the Conservatives did something similar in 2010. I spent a miserable two years in Andover doing my bit to cut the size of the Army from 102,000 to 82,000, and there were sweeping cuts, too, in the RAF and Navy.

Bob Stewart: I remember that in 2010 we cut the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers hugely, and said we would do the job through civilian personnel. Then, in 2015, we cut those civilian personnel. Who will keep all these highly technical things going if we do not have the people?

James Sunderland: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend, as a Corps man myself. It is imperative that we retain these specialist capabilities so that we can prosecute force using the logistical and engineering support we need.

A decade on, there is no doubt that the Government are serious about investing in defence in a way that has not been seen for years. The massive £24 billion boost over the next four years brings the total to over £188 billion before 2025. This is about military power and strength, particularly in the prosecution of force at range, and when the risks of becoming embroiled in another attritional campaign on land can be mitigated, whereby striking at the heart of enemy command and control is so important.

I am concerned about the 72,000 figure for the Regular Army. Every unit has its challenges with under-manning, the training margin, wider commitments and absence from work due to sickness, compassionate leave or maternity, and my sense is that the Army probably needs an establishment of 82,000 to mobilise a strength of 72,000. I am not convinced that the Army can generate a deployable division with those numbers, and I urge the Minister to do his estimate. However, that is the only note of real caution for me and I welcome the publication of the integrated review—an excellent bit of work.

The dilemma for me and for all of us in this place is whether our focus on coalition operations, higher dependence on technology and the perceived peace dividend since the second world war justify the risks of ever smaller armed forces. But none of us can predict the future—not even politicians—and only time will tell whether this is again a bridge too far.

6.7 pm

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): I welcome the Opposition's shift in wanting to have a debate on the strength of the armed forces that focuses on enhancing them rather than weakening them. It would perhaps have been better if the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), had been up front about the £38 billion black hole in the defence budget that the last Labour Government left behind—a shortfall that meant painful cuts were required in the 2010 review. I advised the then Defence Secretary on the 2015 strategic defence and security review, which was about investing once again with a budget that was growing. The integrated review and the Defence Command Paper together build on those reforms and highlight the intensifying threats we face, and the need to continue to modernise and adapt our forces, backed by a budget that matches the ambition.

Contrary to the motion, the plan strengthens our defence capabilities and the power of the armed forces, with major investments across the five domains. Opposition Members have spoken about election pledges, and it is fair to say that we have changed our plans. Instead of increasing defence spending by 0.5% above inflation every year, we are going further by committing to an additional £16.5 billion over the next four years on top of the existing plans. That extra funding is welcome to help to put the budget on a sustainable footing, because for too long MOD spending has involved short-term financial management and delays or deferrals that simply increase the budgetary pressure in future years. However, the opportunity to strengthen our armed forces that this multi-year commitment provides does not remove the need for choices, and how could it? The UK cannot do everything, and focusing on what we do best and working with our allies is at the heart of our global Britain approach.

During the debate, there has been an understandable, if slightly misplaced, focus on the arbitrary numbers in the Regular Army, given the changing picture of threat. In my experience, military chiefs are more interested in the ability to generate and deploy forces rapidly, and a more agile Army with technological advantage can have greater effect with fewer people.

This significant increase in defence spending provides an opportunity to deliver for our servicemen and women, as well as taxpayers, and there now needs to be a clear focus from the Ministry of Defence and the commands on implementing these plans. That means a more agile approach to procurement, with better control of costs and programmes. It means addressing the recommendations of the recent Public Accounts Committee report and having robust plans to deliver efficiency savings. Finally, it means an improved offer for everyone who serves our country, and their families.

6.10 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I rise to support the motion on the Order Paper, not least because I believe that Conservative promises made to protect our

armed forces have sadly been lacking and ring hollow now that they are in government, as is the case with so many of their other promises. At the same time that Ministers want to cut the size of our conventional armed forces, they propose to increase by 40% the UK's nuclear stockpile. I ask the Minister, what is the strategic reason for that decision? How much will it cost? How will the UK be safer with 260 nuclear weapons compared with 180?

Breaking international law and treaty obligations sacrifices our moral authority when we are dealing with regimes such as Iran's that threaten our allies in the middle east. Indeed, in 2015 Ministers promised that the strength of the Army would not fall below 82,000. In truth, we will never meet that target, with the Army's strength standing at 76,350 soldiers. Since 2010, the Conservatives have overseen a reduction in the strength of our armed forces of a quarter, with 40,000 fewer full-time troops now compared with 10 years ago. The Government will weaken the Army further, reducing numbers to 72,500 by 2025.

In 2012, the MOD partnered with private outsourcing contractor Capita to deliver a £1.3 billion recruitment project. I am glad that the contract was not for a new sight for the Army's rifle, because the number recruited since Capita's involvement has not hit the target in any year since the contract was awarded. We should be angry about that wastefulness. Every pound lost in profit squeezed out of a failing contract means fewer soldiers, poorer equipment and fewer opportunities for people to make a career in the services.

Technology is important, but having spent time with veterans as a trustee of the newly formed East Durham Veterans Trust, I must agree with the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Nicholas Houghton, who said:

"I would argue most strongly that it is our people that give the United Kingdom's armed forces our qualitative edge".

We have seen our military in action over the last year during covid, from reinforcing frontline services to building hospitals, delivering vital equipment and running test centres in my constituency. I know that there are Government Members who care passionately about the armed forces, and I ask that they work cross-party to ensure that our armed forces—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order.

6.13 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker,

"I hear it a lot on the Tory benches, this idea of a country that ruled the waves. Rule Britannia... I think that's given way to a nostalgia rooted in the history of the Second World War that somehow says that we're a small island nation that goes out punching above its weight, without ever really stopping to ask why on earth it is that we're punching at all."

Those are the words of the shadow Foreign Secretary, the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), praising a pamphlet that called for the abolition of the Army, its replacement with a gender-balanced security force and the abolition of our submarines.

This volte-face to become the tub-thumping, flag-waving party of our armed forces is about as Damascene as a conversion can be. Not all that long ago, Labour Members were abstaining on giving legal protections to our service personnel while on overseas operations—those who did not actively vote against that. So today's motion again has the whiff of insincerity about it.

[Chris Clarkson]

I grew up on JHQ—the joint headquarters—in Rheindahlen in the 1980s, and the size of the forces and the nature of military operations then was light years away from where it is now. At the time the Berlin wall was standing, the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical threat and in 1983 the film “WarGames” depicted the science fiction scenario of an automated weapons system being hacked for a nuclear strike. Today, China joins Russia as a pre-eminent threat, the longest remaining section of the Berlin wall forms part of the East Side Gallery, several members of the former eastern bloc are now in the EU, and cyber-warfare is conventional.

The simple fact is that the world has changed; the nature of warfare has changed and therefore the way in which we configure our military must inevitably change. We do not have cavalry officers charging into battle on horseback, swords drawn; the needs of the forces today have changed.

What has not changed is the Government’s commitment to ensuring the men and women who keep us safe have the best support in terms of training, equipment and logistics, and it would be breaking faith with them for them to be under-resourced by adhering to a model designed for decades past. But we are going further, because the comprehensive review rightly focuses on the UK military’s single most important asset, its people. We are enshrining the armed forces covenant into law, we are making improvements to the justice system, and we are delivering a pay and career review to ensure military careers are as competitive as those in the private sector.

Labour stood on a hard-left manifesto which would have seen us led by a man who wanted to scrap Trident and leave NATO altogether. Its nationalist neighbours on the Opposition Benches still want to scrap Trident and wanted to tax service personnel more than in any other part of the UK. Our forces deserve our gratitude and our assurance that their Government will work to the geopolitical realities of the day, not the carping rhetoric of a bunch of crypto-Stalinists dragged up as flag-waving patriots in an attempt to hide the fact that they are hopelessly out of touch with the people whose votes they ignored for so long.

6.16 pm

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): One really positive advance that we have made this century has been our recognition of the obligations that the state and wider society have to the members of our armed forces for the work that they do for us and the sacrifices that they make. It was the Labour Government who first acknowledged the necessity of an armed forces covenant, although the Conservatives chose not to bring it into law.

Warrington North is the proud home of the 75 Engineer Regiment, based at the Peninsula barracks in Orford, as well as two historic RAF bases at RAF Burtonwood and RAF Padgate, a hugely important part of our town’s heritage and our nation’s success in defeating fascist tyranny in world war two. This morning I was pleased to meet with the Reserve Forces’ and Cadets’ Association for the north-west of England to discuss how I can sign the covenant as an armed forces-friendly employer myself. We should all do what we can to support the military that defends us and our armed forces communities.

However, the Government plan yet another real-terms forces pay cut: a lance-corporal in the Army will see a cut of £445 and a sergeant in the RAF will lose £610. And, unfortunately, while we have seen this progress in society, the Conservative Government have undermined our military capability, marching us back over 300 years in terms of the size of the Army and now proposing still further cuts. Despite assurances that decisions should be driven by threat analysis rather than budgets, this is the third time that the Tory Government have chosen to reduce our capability, breaking the Prime Minister’s election promise that he would not be “cutting our armed services in any form.”

For him, apparently, a cut to the Army of 10,000 does not count—a worse use of 10,000 men, and indeed women, than the grand old Duke of York.

Ministers say that money is better spent on new technologies. Shiny new tech may be exciting, but leaving aside their repeated failures to deliver over the past decade and to have a procurement policy for defence spending that supports British jobs, tech cannot counter all challenges. In addition to the military threats that we have heard discussed today, in recent years we have needed our armed forces and their expertise as we have coped with increasing floods caused by climate change, and, yes, the covid pandemic as well. Are these strategic threats that Ministers think are either less likely in future or can be addressed with new kit? The first duty of Government is keeping their citizens safe, and reducing our capabilities by this level does the exact opposite.

6.18 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Hull and east Yorkshire has always been a high recruitment area for the armed forces and I give my thanks to each and every one of them for their service, particularly those who have gone over and above during the covid pandemic. Yesterday I attended a meeting of the all-party group on apprenticeships and we heard about the number, breadth and variety of defence apprenticeships offered. Hon. Members will therefore understand my sincere disappointment at hearing of the 10,000 cut to armed forces personnel, denying people the opportunities that so many of my local residents have had previously.

Hon. Members will also understand why I found that particularly hard after the news of the closure of the BAE Brough site. The first aircraft factory was created in Brough in 1916. The site entered the service of the Royal Navy in 1959. It continued in active service with the Fleet Air Arm and the RAF over 30 years. It is best known for manufacturing the Hawk, seen the world over being operated by our fantastic Red Arrows aerobatic team. The Hawk T1 training craft is currently being retired, and Britain’s aircraft fleet has shrunk to its smallest in RAF history. Fewer F-35s are being ordered to replace those lost aircraft.

I must convey to the House the sincere disappointment that 104 years of aircraft manufacturing came to an end on Christmas eve 2020, under this Government’s watch. One hundred and four years of aircraft manufacturing; it kept going through both world wars, through continuous change and through Governments of different political persuasions, only to end on Christmas eve 2020. The only positive from this sorry tale is that I can give my thanks to Unite the trade union for the work it did in

mitigating redundancies and saving people from losing their jobs during the pandemic. I give particular thanks to the Unite rep Jarrod Rex for the work that he did.

I ask the Government to do the right thing and learn a lesson from BAE, which was able to mitigate some redundancies by allowing people to be remote-based. It allowed people to be officially employed at various other sites around the country while still living in Hull and East Riding, because they could continue to work from home and be registered as employees. That helped save jobs, and BAE is now working with the trade unions to look at the future way of working and see whether more jobs can be offered as more permanent remote opportunities. I urge the Government to look into that in detail, because if it were expanded, it could bring more much-needed high-skilled jobs to areas such as Hull West and Hessle.

6.21 pm

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): The strength of our armed forces is in the people who serve in them, and of course this Government's commitment to them. Any armed forces should seek to reflect the character of the nation, and ours do. They reflect our values of peace and protecting international law, they seek to deter aggression and maintain peace, they help people worldwide with aid at times of crisis, and they protect our trade links, with our Navy protecting shipping from modern-day pirates. Our armed forces fly the flag for UK interests. They reflect our huge soft power as a nation, not just our physical strength.

The discipline and professionalism of our forces is recognised throughout the world as second to none. The British Army has helped train armed forces all over the world, and countries have sent their future officers and leaders to our military training centres for hundreds of years. That ensures that our nation's values are shared across the globe. That is the strength of our armed forces.

Defence is an ever-changing landscape, with battlefields no longer in trenches but in artificial intelligence technology and cyber capabilities. Importantly, as we face one of the UK's biggest strategic landscape shifts—leaving the EU—as global Britain, our armed forces will again take the lead. That is not a nostalgic view.

The recent defence review is the widest-ranging and possibly the most significant since the end of the cold war. The review ensures that we will exceed our manifesto and NATO spending commitments. It is a modernisation programme that encompasses the new areas of cyber and space defence, reflecting future threats and future battlefields. It is a symbol that the UK has a global role and a global ambition. It represents a Government—this Government—that understand the nature of the world in which we operate, all backed by a £24.1 billion boost in defence spending, helping to create a stronger, more secure Union.

Compare and contrast that with Labour's position. The last Labour Government oversaw the Territorial Army's being cut by almost 40%. Opposition Front Benchers want to replace our armed forces altogether with human security services. I am not sure they respect or have any understanding of the importance of our armed forces. That is not forgetting that Labour had planned shamelessly to use our flag and our veterans to gain votes—it is shameful that it was using our armed forces as a campaign tool, while refusing to take our nation's defence seriously.

This Government do take the nation's defence seriously, and they have a proud tradition of protecting their people. Those values are the foundation of our security and prosperity. I thank all those who serve to protect and defend, particularly those from my constituency, for their sense of duty, and of course those I sit alongside on the Government Benches. The armed forces of this great and United Kingdom are one of our finest assets and one of our greatest strengths. Long may they continue.

6.24 pm

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab) [V]: It has taken just 16 months for the Prime Minister to break his election promise not to reduce the size of the UK's armed forces. For a party that likes to think of itself as strong on defence, it makes no sense for the Tory Defence Secretary to have announced last month that the Government are cutting the size of the Army, this time by 10,000. That comes on top of the 45,000 cut from the whole armed forces since 2010.

It is a slap in the face for our armed forces personnel, many of whom are recruited from working-class areas like Jarrow, here in the north-east. Under the Conservatives, our armed forces have seen a decade of decline. Forces personnel and their families have been forced to live in substandard accommodation while receiving below-inflation pay rises for the past seven years.

Hidden within the Government's defence plans is a 2.7% cut in day-to-day spending over the next four years. That translates into a pay cut of £445 for a lance-corporal, with a sergeant in the RAF losing £610. Armed forces personnel deserve so much better. They have helped the country through this pandemic and played a key role in building Nightingale hospitals and assisting in the vaccine roll-out. At one point, 95% of mobile testing centres around the country were run by the military. We owe them a great deal.

There is no doubt that the threats that we face as a country have changed in modern times and that spending needs to be focused accordingly, but as the pandemic has highlighted, highly trained personnel are indispensable. On a wider industrial point, I agree with Unite the union's response to the Government's integrated review: the UK already has the skills, capabilities and ambition to be developing the cutting-edge technology needed to meet both today's and future challenges; the only thing holding it back is a lack of vision, ambition and support from Government.

The Government must produce a long-term plan to boost Britain's foundation industries, in steel, shipbuilding, aerospace and cyber-security as national assets. That is essential because the defence of the nation is linked with the defence of our national economy. The Prime Minister said in November that he was ending an era of retreat regarding the defence cuts made by previous Tory Governments. But after the integrated review and the defence Command Paper, yet again there appears to be a vast difference between what the Government say and what the Government do.

6.27 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I get the idea of grey-zone warfare. I studied strategy; I realise that we cannot fight the next war as we fought the last war—I get that, too. The real problem is that we are going to have to do the next war in a different way. I get that. But we have not fought a total war as envisaged, and on

[Bob Stewart]

which the integrated review is predicated, for over 70 years. Instead, we have fought limited engagements. We have done counter-insurgency, peacekeeping and peacemaking. Some 99%—almost 100%, actually—of all operations have required us to put soldiers on the ground. Suddenly, we are saying that everything should be predicated on grey-zone warfare, and that leaves little else.

Having commanded men—and women, by the way—on peacekeeping missions, I can tell hon. Members that there is a real argument in favour of having enough of them. We are going to cut our Army by 12%. That is an enormous loss. I understand that tanks can be taken out from over the horizon. The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict showed that: the poor devils in those tanks didn't know what hit them. We have to redesign how we fight and where our tanks go—I get that. But it does seem odd that we are saying tanks are somehow obsolete when we have aircraft carriers that are 500 times bigger and marked from space by a red dot that an intercontinental missile could take out very fast.

I will end by saying how disappointed I am that my Government have cut the regiment I commanded in Bosnia, without even telling me about it in advance—not even one little word. It was dreadful, and it hits me personally. So if I am talking with emotion, so be it. The 2nd Battalion the Mercian Regiment did not deserve that, when you think that, per head of population, each Scot has three times as many battalions as each Englishwoman or Englishman—the Scots have three times more infantry battalions than we do in England.

Mr Kevan Jones: And they're all Fijians.

Bob Stewart: And indeed, as my good friend says, they are Fijian. Increasingly, those battalions will have to be manned by Englishmen.

I will end on that point. I understand the logic; I disagree with the result.

6.30 pm

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): It is a privilege to be called in this debate, particularly because Burnley and Padiham have a very long and proud history of service in the armed forces.

Our starting point with any defence review should always be the threats that we face. I have a huge amount of respect for my right hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who just spoke, but threats have evolved quite significantly in recent years. The grey zone is real, and it does require a very real assessment of what those threats are and how we need to address them. We need to move towards a much more agile, smaller type deployment. That is why it is positive to see in the defence Command Paper and the integrated review such things as the Army ranger regiment: small groups of better trained people who can detect, deploy and deter aggression. That is what we are seeing our adversaries do. That is what we are seeing the Russians do with increasing frequency, be it in Ukraine, Syria or other such locations.

There are two big capabilities advancements in the defence Command Paper that deserve a particular welcome and credit to the Government. The first is the National

Cyber Force, because cyber-warfare is only going to increase. I am sure you will join me, Mr Deputy Speaker, in agreeing that placing it in the north-west is a very welcome development. The second thing that the Government deserve specific credit for is Team Tempest and investing in the next generation of combat aircraft. If we know one thing, it is that if we do not invest in aerospace manufacturing skills—I say this as a Member of Parliament who represents a proud aerospace manufacturing area—we will lose those skills forever. Tempest gives us the ability to work with allies across the world, currently Sweden and Italy, to develop an aircraft that will put us at the cutting edge of warfare and allow us to deploy manned aircraft surrounded by unmanned assets, building on those small deployments of Army rangers or special forces.

We have heard quite a lot in this debate about what is being cut, but I actually do not think the defence Command Paper and the integrated review are reductions in capabilities. They are actually new capabilities. The National Cyber Force is a totally new capability. Tempest is a totally new capability. The multi-role ocean surveillance ship is a new capability. Type 83 is a new capability. Artificial intelligence is a new capability. So if we are going to have a debate about what force structure we need in the armed forces in the next 20 or 30 years, we should do so.

I will end with the US—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry about that, but time is up.

6.34 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate; I was not entirely sure that I would get the opportunity.

I am pleased that the right hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) spoke today. His valued comments were missed in our last debate on the subject: it was a real shame not to hear from him on that day, although I cited him in my speech. It was also good to hear from the right hon. Members for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) and for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), all of whose voices I value greatly for the knowledge, expertise and experience that they bring to these debates.

It is not my specialist subject at all, but I have real concerns about where this is going. I have been extremely concerned for a couple of years now about recruitment numbers in our forces. I think that Serco has been managing it—it was almost as if it were being managed such that the numbers would fall, anticipating the Government's position.

As I mentioned in the last debate, we are talking about an Army that will be as small as the US special forces. We are talking about the British Army! I once considered joining it, and I would have been very proud to represent the country. The notion that the UK could have a smaller force than the US special forces is quite extraordinary.

I hear the point about new technologies, but let us think back to the advent of the aeroplane and the birth of the Royal Air Force, or the introduction of tanks. Did we cut our forces then because of the new technology? No, we built on what we had. We have some fine forces and expertise, and we are well respected and well regarded around the world for them.

My point on this topic the other week was about peacekeeping and the importance of having people who can make the case, who can win hearts and minds, and who are actually trusted, as we saw in Sierra Leone, the Balkans and elsewhere. That is why we should be maintaining our forces and building on them with new technologies. We have to pay for our security—it is as simple as that. The threats are different from 10 or 15 years ago. We must invest in the new technologies, but keep what we have.

6.36 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Opposition for securing this important debate in which I have much interest—it is a matter of great concern to me. When I asked the Prime Minister in November about the physical forms of war and recruitment, his answer referred to our being “full spectrum capable”, so I want to speak briefly about capability.

What the news reports are saying is that the fat is cut and now we are cutting bone, as I believe *The Economist* put it. If that is what we are arriving at with the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, we have a real problem. I understand the need to focus attention on technological warfare; that is common sense. Our armed forces have the reputation of being the best of the best, and that has stayed true because of the bravery and intelligence of our personnel, but also because we are always moving forward and looking for better ways with less loss of life and more effective plans. But in my opinion, to allow our trained operatives' numbers to fall is—I say this gracefully to the Minister—folly. If they determine that they will slog on without enough staff to carry out their workload, in time they will fail. Our armed forces are not a department in which we can accept failure.

I have also read, and defence sources have acknowledged, that the air force cuts would reduce logistics and supply capacity. If I have read it, others have read it. Our enemies will have read it and will be rubbing their hands, whether they be in Russia, China or wherever else in the world. I have great concerns about that.

I will conclude by putting on the record my thanks to the armed forces medics in Northern Ireland for their help during the most pressurised hospitalisations due to covid. Over the years, we in Northern Ireland have had 30 years of conflict. The past few months have indicated that unfortunately the shadow of conflict is never far away from both sides of the community. It is more important than ever, as the police force is put under pressure in Northern Ireland, to know that we have a British Army that we can call upon; the right hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who served in Northern Ireland, said that as well. I seek that assurance from the Minister today.

6.39 pm

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): Let me start by paying a few tributes. If my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) was in her place today she would certainly mention the long history of the armed forces, especially the Accrington Pals, in Lancashire. Indeed, one of my proudest moments as an elected representative was in my role as a councillor in Pendle when we gave the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment the freedom of the borough.

Members from all parts of this Chamber respect our armed forces—I do mean that sincerely—and we have a long history of doing so. We may differ on what we

think is needed at a particular time, but we do have a strong respect for the defence of this nation, and rightly so, because that is one of the oaths that we make when we come to this place.

As has been said by many Members—I will try not to repeat what has been said—the nature of warfare is changing; it is constantly evolving. Every time we find a new defence, someone will find a new method of attack. The problem is becoming more global, more cyber and much more biological in its intent, so do we need the same number of forces as we once did? The answer, unfortunately, is no.

Bob Stewart: Forgive me for intervening yet again, but may I point out that, on most of our operations, we cannot win hearts and minds with a drone, with artificial intelligence or with a precision-guided missile? We must have men and women who talk to people.

Christian Wakeford: I thank my right hon. and gallant Friend for his point because it leads me on to what I was about to say. The nature of our armed forces has very much become part of our soft power in international realms, in that it is a peacekeeping force. We go out to offer support across the world when there are natural disasters and when it comes to peacekeeping in areas that need extra support, and we are proud to carry on doing so.

When we look at the support that we offer across the globe, I hope that we can consider maintaining that 0.7% in international aid. That is a very powerful tool in preventing some of these issues from arising in the first place. With peacekeeping, yes, I agree that we do not necessarily need drones, but we do need to find a way to attack some of these powers that are coming forward and that are increasing in their own nature of warfare. Whether we consider the cyber-attacks from Russia or Iran or the biological weapons from elsewhere, it is clear, unfortunately, that some of these places are not safe to send our soldiers. We must consider the safety of our armed forces. For many years, Governments of whatever party have not got that right. I am thinking specifically here of the war in Iraq.

It is right that we are considering this matter. Warfare is evolving and we need to change to keep up with that. We are increasing our expenditure on the armed forces, more than we have done since the cold war, and it is right to do so. It is right that we consider the safety of our nation, but we need to do so in a technological, biological and evolving way, which is why I will not be supporting the motion as it is today. I say that as a proud Member representing a regimental town. The armed forces have a long history there; long may that continue. It is very unfortunate that, again, we are debating not a motion of opposition, but a motion of opportunism. With elections coming up, I wonder why. We are proud of our armed forces on this side of the House, and that will continue for many years to come.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We have to go to the wind-ups now.

6.44 pm

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): I associate myself with the remarks and tributes made by the shadow Defence Secretary, the Minister and other Members

[*Stephen Morgan*]

of this House to the Duke of Edinburgh, who was a great friend of Portsmouth, the heart and home of the Royal Navy.

Let me start by echoing the contributions from across the House that have recognised and honoured the continuing commitment and service of our armed forces. From the imminent departure of the Carrier Strike group from my constituency in Portsmouth to supporting frontline services across the UK as they tackle the pandemic, our armed forces have risen to the unique operational challenges presented by the past year, and which continue to present themselves, with courage, integrity and resilience—something that I know we all admire.

We are here today as a direct result of this Government's broken promises to our armed forces, and this has been an important debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) reminded us of a catalogue of examples of successive Tory Governments running down our defence numbers and capabilities, a point echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer). The Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), also described sweeping cuts and the impact these will have in the busy decade ahead with new threats, and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) said so eloquently—as he always does—that retaining talent is so important, and that despite changes to threats, people remain constant.

This Prime Minister promised to end Britain's "era of retreat", and that no further cuts would be made to our armed forces. Instead, he has further eroded our fighting strength. Some 45,000 personnel have been cut since 2010; now, the integrated review and Command Paper have confirmed that the Army will be further reduced to just 72,500 by 2025, smaller than at any time since the 1700s. As many Members of this House have already said today, this will sever the historical and prosperous links our armed forces have with communities across the UK and reduce services and pay for those serving, points well made by my hon. Friends the Members for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) and for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck). The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) also stressed the importance of supporting those who serve.

As ever for Conservative Governments, it is cuts today, with the ever-seductive, seemingly undeliverable promise of jam tomorrow in the form of new technology. There can be no doubt that our forces need to modernise, but that leaves our national defences concerningly vulnerable in the medium term. This is particularly worrisome at a time when the integrated review has identified a growing number of sophisticated threats to our national security. While these threats are undeniably evolving and increasingly operate in the grey zone, Russian military build-up on the Ukrainian border is a timely reminder of the need to maintain strong conventional capabilities today as well as to invest for tomorrow. However, the Government also remain silent on any future co-operation with European partners through the common security and defence policy.

As we have heard today, it is not just raw people power that the Army is set to lose; it is set to lose capabilities. Conservative cuts to the conventional strength of our forces with a promise of pioneering technology

are nothing new. Tory Ministers promised the same thing in the 2010 and 2015 reviews, yet they failed to deliver. In 2010, they promised a future force by 2020, and in 2015, promised a warfighting division with a strike force by 2025. That is now being promised in 2030. In 2015, the Chief of the Defence Staff said that the ability to field a single warfighting division was "the standard whereby a credible army is judged."

However, a recent Defence Committee report on the Army's armoured vehicle capability says that the division would be "hopelessly under-equipped" and "overmatched" by adversaries.

The integrated review has placed particular importance on carrier strike groups as a platform to project global Britain, yet at least two of the Type 23 frigates that will escort them and specialise in hunting submarines are due to be phased out before the replacements are built, as continued ambiguity around the number of F-35 fighters the Government will order means that we do not have nearly enough to fill both of our aircraft carriers, leaving them vulnerable to missile and drone attacks. In the meantime, as the Royal United Services Institute has pointed out, these sweeping cuts mean that the UK can no longer call itself a tier 1 or full spectrum military power. Despite the Prime Minister's welcome injection of £16.5 billion in capital funding after a decade of decline, many of the decisions in the integrated review seem to have been driven by finances, as opposed to threats.

It is no secret that successive Conservative Governments have chronically mismanaged the MOD's budget. The National Audit Office reports a black hole in the defence budget of up to £17 billion, and we are still not clear on how much of the extra money will be swallowed by the deficit in current programmes. After a decade of short-sighted, last-minute decision making and poor procurement practice, our capabilities have fallen behind our allies and potential adversaries, and it is our forces on the ground who will be vulnerable. As right hon. and hon. Members across the House have pointed out, all of this comes at a time when the threats we face are immediate, growing, and complex. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) reminded us of the threat that our nation's security faces from the climate crisis.

Defence of the realm is the first priority of any Government. From the publication of the integrated review and the Defence Command Paper, it is clear that this Government have not only broken their promises on fighting strength but taken a significant gamble with our national security in the medium term. Our adversaries will exploit the continuing holes in our capability, but Labour is determined to ensure that our country can protect itself properly now and in the future. The Government talk up their commitment to our armed forces, but the truth is that they have failed at every turn. Members from across the House have the opportunity to place their concerns on record by voting for this motion, and I hope they will consider our service personnel, still the core of our fighting forces, when they come to vote this evening.

6.50 pm

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): It has been an interesting debate. As you well know, Mr Deputy Speaker, I thoroughly enjoy any debates in the House on military or veterans matters,

and today has been another one. There have been some enthusiastic contributions, which is fantastic to see. Some of them were slightly light on detail and facts, but I am not going to work through correcting all of those because I understand the premise of the debate and I will respond to a couple of the points that have been made.

I would just gently say that we must never treat our service people in this country like they are stupid. For Members to claim that everything under a Labour Government has been okay and that the Conservative Government have slashed and burned the military is to treat people who serve and people in this country like they are stupid. It is fundamentally untrue. There have been challenges over the years, and the really uncomfortable and embarrassing truth for Opposition Members who are so loud is that I was actually fighting in the compounds in Afghanistan when the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) was a Minister in the Department, and I can tell the House that it was a deeply unpleasant experience that was made more unpleasant by the management and leadership of the Department at the time. So I will take no lessons in party politics when it comes to what has happened with defence.

We all agree that strong armed forces are essential to the wellbeing of our nation. As the Minister for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey), mentioned, the reforms we have set out in our integrated review and in the Defence Command Paper will enhance, rather than reduce, the strength of our military to meet future threats. One of my hon. Friends who is no longer in his place talked about the strength of the military and what that strength actually is. I think it was someone rather unpleasant who said that mass had a force of its own, and I am not going to deny that. To deny it would be to scream at the weather.

I have huge sympathy with my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who I have had deep feeling for over a number of years. I have huge respect for his service and for what he did during his time, but it is a truth—a truism—that our people are now more capable and we can do more at reach for a longer period of time with greater strategic effect than we could 20 years ago. That is a truism of global conflict. I totally understand the frustrations, and I apologise to my right hon. Friend that nobody spoke to him before the decision was made on his sub-unit. I will go and investigate what happened there. But it is a truism that we can be more capable and achieve more with fewer individuals in uniform now.

As for the idea that the military is being cut, we have to be honest with the British people. Yes, there are going to be fewer people in the military, but we can now deploy at a far faster rate and at a far greater global reach, and that is what matters today. So yes, mass has a force all of its own, and you will find no Minister in the Defence Department who does not want more money for the Defence budget and more people in the military, but the reality is, as the Secretary of State has said a number of times, that we have to operate within the envelope of our ambition in this country when it comes to the military. In that context, it is a very good and exciting review, and I will come on to talk about the people, because I know that a number of Members raised issues around how people are treated.

I will, if I may, briefly pay tribute to some of the contributions. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) spoke on his traditional theme of CASD. The commitment of those who maintain the continuous at-sea deterrent is extraordinary, and it is a commitment not only from them, but from their families. If we think about what it means to go away on those boats for a prolonged period of time, we realise that separation without any contact is extraordinary, and their commitment endures year after year. We owe them a huge debt for the ongoing security they provide in this country.

The right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) again went on about all the mistakes Tory Governments have made over the years. I have addressed that. I think it is disingenuous, and I am not going to say any more on that. My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) again talked about CASD and the commitment—

John Spellar: Will the Minister give way?

Johnny Mercer: No, I am not going to give way. *[Interruption.]* No, no, no.

Mr Kevan Jones: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will take your advice, but is it in order to call a Member disingenuous?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): If I had heard anything that was out of order, I would certainly have called it into order. It is part of the debate.

Johnny Mercer: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am getting used to it now.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) made some really important points. I know that he spent a long time on such operations, as I did, and he actually made a really critical point, which is that there are no easy answers to these debates. None of them is binary: they are calibrated decisions about where the threat is, how we are going to meet it, and what equipment or people we are going to meet it with. I appreciated his contribution.

When it comes to armed forces families, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) for the important work that he consistently does in the family space and the people space. On that one issue, I can tell the House unequivocally that this review process has put people at the heart of defence. For the first time, we have produced a document that outlines what the offer is to attract and retain this country's most talented individuals to a career in defence. I would encourage all Members of this House to go and read that, understand the opportunities that are now available, and then go and speak to the people who are serving.

While we will all have a view on defence—based on what we have been briefed on and what intelligence and secret information we have privileged access to—we will all have a different view, including those who have retired. I respect all those who have retired of senior rank and so on, but the crucial thing is to go and speak to the people who serve and ask them what they think about the opportunities that are going to be afforded to them with careers in cyber, space, technical training and

[Johnny Mercer]

operations of the sort that were conducted by a very small specialist cohort in the military only 10 or 15 years ago. It is important to speak to them about the opportunities afforded by the future accommodation model or about mental health care now, where they can access a single front door and be totally confident that they will have a secure and coherent care pathway through NHS mental health services.

These lines—these campaign lines—are trotted out, and I understand that. I understand how this place works, but I am afraid I will draw the line when it comes to saying things that are simply not correct about our military, because we already have enough challenges. Everybody knows that I have come to this place to try to reset the relationship between the military and the nation, so I will be honest with colleagues when that line is broken, but this review puts people at the heart of defence. It is a good piece of work, and I am proud of it. I think we can honestly look young people in the eye today in all of our constituencies and maintain that defence remains the No. 1, premier choice of career for our young and talented people in this country.

I thank all Members for their contributions to the debate today. As I say, it has been very interesting and very passionate, and there were a lot of fair points. There is not one school of thought on this, but we do have to operate within the envelope we have been asked to operate within. In that respect, it is a good review. We should get behind it, and be proud of the UK's armed forces, which remain the finest armed forces in the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am now going to put the Question, and you will be expected to vote the way you are shouting. Clearly, if I hear one audible and persistent voice, you will have a vote, and a vote is expected.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 357.

Division No. 251]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
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
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
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
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
Debonnaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Flynn, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Girvan, Paul
Glendon, Mary
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh 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
Lockhart, Carla
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lynch, Holly
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.
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
McMorris, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Paisley, Ian
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget

Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
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
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
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:
Colleen Fletcher and
Gill Furniss

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
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
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
Davies, Philip
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, rh 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
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
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 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, rh 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
 Rutley, David
 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, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh 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
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Maria Caulfield and
James Morris

Question accordingly negatived.

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.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS)

That the draft Nuclear Safeguards (Fissionable Material and Relevant International Agreements) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.—(*Michael Tomlinson.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

DIOCESAN BOARDS OF EDUCATION MEASURE

That the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure (HC 1259), passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which it was laid before Parliament.—(*Andrew Selous [V].*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CATHEDRALS MEASURE

That the Cathedrals Measure (HC 1260), passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which it was laid before Parliament.—(*Andrew Selous [V].*)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Gambling regulation

7.10 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP):
 The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran,

Declares that there is significant concern about the recent collapse of the betting firm Football Index following the suspension of the company's license by the Gambling Commission and its entry into administration; notes that customers collectively have over £90 million trapped in the company with average losses of around £3,000 per customer; further declares that the petitioners understand that the firm operated as a 'football stock market', offering customers the ability to buy 'shares' in footballers whose price would increase or decrease, and customers could be paid in 'dividends' based on player performances; further that, only a few days after the company 'minted' new shares in footballers and enticed customers to purchase shares, the company drastically decreased dividend payments by 82%, leading to a virtual market crash on the site which caused significant losses for customers; further that concerns have been raised that the firm operated like a pyramid scheme and that it had been admonished by the Advertising Standards Authority in 2019 for creating the impression that the product was a lucrative investment opportunity; and further that this scandal has called into question the adequacy of

gambling regulation in the UK, given the Gambling Commission saw fit to give this company a license and apparently failed to ensure adequate oversight.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the UK Government to launch a full independent public inquiry into this scandal to ensure that gambling regulation is fit for purpose in protecting consumers.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002656]

Return to work after the pandemic

7.12 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I recently met Scope, the disability charity, which expressed concerns to me about a number of disabled people being compelled to return to work from furlough. We know, for example, that just 8.5% of people in the clinically extremely vulnerable category have received both doses of the vaccine, and the Government's own figures show that 14% of disabled workers are employed in the wholesale and retail trade.

The petition has been presented to me, and it asks that the Government amend the coronavirus job retention scheme so that any disabled worker who is concerned about returning to work during the pandemic has the right to be put on furlough if they cannot work from home. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to consider ensuring that people with disabilities can make the decision on whether to return to work or remain on furlough. The onus should be on employees to decide, not the employer.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Glasgow East,

Declares that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused huge changes to the working patterns of many people across the UK, with the furlough scheme helping to support many businesses; further that restrictions across the UK are beginning to ease, with more businesses opening their doors, meaning that many people are returning to work; further that, despite the necessary safety precautions, some people with disabilities do not feel comfortable returning to work as of yet, and would rather wait until infection rates and COVID-19 cases have fallen further; further that the UK Government should ensure that nobody, particularly a person with a disability or health concern, is forced to return to work; further that the Government should commit to ensuring that the onus is on the employee to make the decision over their return to work, not the employer; further that if an employee wishes to stay on the furlough scheme they should be able to make this decision without repercussion and fear of losing their employment.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to consider ensuring that people with disabilities are able to make the decision on whether to return to work or whether to remain on furlough and that this should be the employee's decision, not the employer's.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002657]

Hammersmith Bridge

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Michael Tomlinson.)

7.14 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I thank Mr Speaker for granting the debate, because this issue is of such interest to my constituents and to people in many other constituencies surrounding mine throughout south and west London. Hammersmith bridge has been closed for over two years. In that time, we have had a pandemic, moved billions of pounds around the country, and vaccinated half the country, yet we still have not fixed Hammersmith bridge. My constituents are really frustrated by that.

Hammersmith bridge is an early prototype of the suspension bridge. It has a unique historical value, as well as being a major London artery, and we need a unique funding solution to enable a temporary bridge to open urgently, and for the restoration and the future of the bridge to be secured. Hammersmith bridge is not in my constituency, nor in the constituencies of some Members attending the debate, but that shows the wide-ranging impact of the bridge's closure on hundreds of thousands of Londoners and why its reopening is so important and so urgent.

Our health in Putney is being damaged by the increase in pollution on our high street from the additional 4,000 vehicles a day that are being diverted. Journeys to school, to work and to healthcare appointments are very long. Businesses are suffering. This cannot go on. Time and again, we have put the case to Ministers. I have raised the matter in Westminster Hall debates, at Transport questions and business questions, in written questions, through a public petition and in letter after letter, yet here we are again, and the bridge is still not open.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the primary responsibility for the upkeep of the bridge lies with Hammersmith and Fulham Council, which owns the bridge and has responsibility for its maintenance? My borough has two bridges: Albert bridge and Chelsea bridge. It takes full responsibility for those bridges. Over the last 10 years, it has invested £12 million to £13 million in Albert bridge, and it is about to do work on Chelsea bridge.

Fleur Anderson: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's intervention. It has been said many times in many places that it is up to Hammersmith and Fulham Council, but that is absolutely not the case. Hammersmith bridge is a unique historical structure with a unique bill—£141 million. No council in London could afford that. Therefore, this issue needs a unique funding solution. I will talk about that and the bid that Hammersmith and Fulham Council has made to the Government, but now is the time for the Government to step up, because Hammersmith and Fulham Council cannot do this on its own.

I was on Putney embankment on Easter Saturday on what would have been boat race weekend, but the race could not run on the Thames because of the danger to the boats of going under the bridge. I teamed up with local rowing organisations and hundreds of constituents to protest the continuing inaction about Hammersmith

[*Fleur Anderson*]

bridge and to call on the Government to step up, play their part and fund its restoration. There were boats from the London Rowing Club, Wandsworth Youth River Club and Putney High School Boat Club out on the water, all of which are affected by the closure. Hundreds of local people came by, and it was not necessary for me to persuade anyone to sign the banner and send a clear message to the Secretary of State for Transport to open the bridge.

Last week, I went out on my first canvass since the start of the pandemic. I knocked on my first door in Roehampton, eager to speak to constituents again, and asked, “What issue is important to you?” The first thing they said was, “Hammersmith bridge.”

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): The hon. Member is making an excellent speech, and I am extremely grateful to her for bringing the matter back to the Floor of the House for debate once more. I wonder whether she would mind me taking the opportunity to highlight the massive impact that the closure has had on the residents of Barnes in my constituency. She mentioned the difficulties that people have had in getting to work and accessing healthcare. The biggest growing issue that we have had since the reopening of schools at the beginning of March is children getting to school. They have all already suffered massive disruption to their education, but many are finding that, where they could previously walk to school in 10 to 15 minutes, it now takes them upwards of an hour on crowded public transport during the pandemic.

On top of the pressures those children are already experiencing—some with exam stress, and all the uncertainty and disruption that they have faced—they now have the additional anxiety of how to get to and from school in a way that they have never experienced. I want to highlight the massive impact that the bridge’s closure is having on young people on both sides of the bridge and the really difficult experience they are having, and to urge the Minister to come to the table and find a solution.

Fleur Anderson: I thank the hon. Lady for highlighting the impact on young people. I have had an email from a sixth-former in my constituency who said that they formerly left from home at 7.30 am but now have to leave at 6 o’clock in the morning. This is having a really bad impact on students across the constituency.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on her excellent speech. My constituents are also impacted, particularly by the additional road traffic that is finding its way through Chiswick as a result of the closure of Hammersmith bridge—2 or 3 miles away.

May I highlight the concern for the businesses and operators that use the river and have been unable to gain access upstream and downstream of Hammersmith bridge? They may not go under Hammersmith bridge unless the RNLI is on an emergency call, or they have to book in advance for very restricted opening—it has been on Sundays. This has had an impact not only on the RNLI’s training, maintenance needs and refuelling, but on businesses such as boatyards and the commercial

tour operators, whose core business is travelling up and down the river. There is effectively a block on that at the moment, and that will continue until Hammersmith bridge is made safe.

Fleur Anderson: I agree absolutely, and I thank my hon. Friend for sharing the impact that the closure is having on so many businesses and organisations, and even on the RNLI, in London.

As the Minister will know, the bridge, which is one of the oldest suspension bridges in the world, was closed to cars two years ago and then fully closed to all vehicles in August 2020. The impact that is having in my constituency—and, clearly, in neighbouring constituencies—is catastrophic. However, I am not here to make the case for why the bridge needs urgently to reopen. That is so obvious, and I think it is something the Minister and I can agree on. I am here to spell out to the Minister and her Department that the biggest obstacle to progress at the moment is funding, and that only the Government have the funds, resources and legislative ability to make the changes needed to reopen and restore the bridge and to get south-west London moving again.

I want to make three points: first, about the taskforce; secondly, about Hammersmith and Fulham Council; and finally, about solutions. The taskforce, which was set up in September last year, seems to have morphed into a significant barrier to any sort of progress, instead of making the urgent progress that we need. It is little task and no force. Hammersmith and Fulham Council, Richmond Borough Council and Transport for London have carried out the actions detailed for them in the taskforce meeting, but the Government have not brought the action needed from their side.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case, but I think she is being slightly too generous towards the taskforce. A letter from the Hammersmith Society, which is a strictly non-political and very civilised body, to the Prime Minister two weeks ago ends by saying that

“the communities on both sides of the river are unified in their anger, their disappointment and their despair at the failure of their government.”

I held a debate identical to this a year ago when the Minister was engaging with the issue and looking at bids. We have actually gone backwards in the past year, and silly political games are being played, as typified by the intervention from the hon. Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan). What we need is a solution and funding for this major project.

Fleur Anderson: I thank my hon. Friend for so eloquently sharing the frustration we are feeling. I think you can understand that, Mr Deputy Speaker, and that you are feeling it from all the interventions this evening.

The taskforce has come up with no workable solutions, although the ferry will be opening in the summer. It has simply trotted out tired statements and has not discussed financing, which is why funding is the focus of the debate.

My second point concerns the financial role of Hammersmith and Fulham Council. Many people have said to me, “Why can’t the council pay for the bridge?” To expect the council to fund the restoration of the bridge and any temporary measures is unfair and

unreasonable—and in fact impossible. Hammersmith bridge is extremely expensive to fix compared with other London bridges, as was mentioned earlier, in part because it is London's earliest remaining example of a suspension structure over the river, and because of the unusual materials it is built from—cast iron, which can shatter, wrought iron and wood—and its suspension mechanisms are unique. That puts the cost of repair at an eye-watering £141 million, which is unaffordable for Hammersmith and Fulham Council, as for any council.

Felicity Buchan: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Fleur Anderson: I will continue to explain and address the point the hon. Member made earlier.

Since 2010, the Government have cut the council's annual net budget from £180 million to £124 million this year. Even taking a loan would cause significant cuts to local services or huge rises in council tax, so the cost of repairing the bridge would be more than the council's entire budget.

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend is being most generous in giving way. In fact, both Hammersmith and Fulham Council and Transport for London have contributed a sum of about £25 million. The Government have not contributed a penny towards the repair of Hammersmith bridge so far. Hammersmith has come up with schemes for a new temporary bridge, and so has TfL, and for stabilisation and repair. It is all there. The only people who will not engage with this are the Government, and they are doing that for deliberate political reasons.

Fleur Anderson: I thank my hon. Friend, and I hope that when the Minister has her opportunity to speak she will not ask again for Hammersmith and Fulham Council to fund an unprecedented 50% contribution to the bridge's repair. That is clearly unreasonable, especially when the precedent for contributions from councils to national infrastructure projects is 15%. That makes me question whether the Government are genuinely interested in resolving the situation, or are just going to leave it.

Instead, the taskforce suggested in October 2020 that Hammersmith and Fulham Council come up with a financing plan. The council, together with TfL, had made funding applications to the Government in December 2019, February 2020 and June 2020. All three bids were rejected by the Government, and we do not know why. Instead, Hammersmith and Fulham Council went away, talked to experts and came up with a new plan—the “Outline Financial Plan”—which it submitted on 19 February.

I want to pre-empt any answer that the Minister may be ready to give about waiting for Hammersmith and Fulham Council to do more, or any repetition of the response of Baroness Vere of Norbiton to a joint letter from me, my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury). The Baroness's response was:

“I suggest that it would be most beneficial for you to support the local authority in developing its preferred funding option so that we can progress the business case.”

The funding option was submitted on 19 February, seven weeks ago, and we are still waiting for a response. This is not the urgent action we need.

Any response will need the Government to agree to set up a special company or trust fund. It will need Government legislation, financial underwriting and an assurance of future revenue from Government funds or from a toll. The council needs to have that input from the Government to continue. The ball is now firmly in the Government's court, not that of Hammersmith and Fulham Council. To say that would be to play the type of party politics that local residents are absolutely fed up with.

That brings me to my third and final point, about solutions. I hope that the Minister will shortly announce how the Government will take responsibility for the Government's vital role in restoring the bridge. The ferry service is a partial solution—it starts in the summer—but it will not address vehicles going through Putney and it will not stop the long bus journeys for Roehampton residents.

Sarah Olney: Briefly, does the hon. Lady agree that one of the significant disadvantages to the ferry service, welcome though it is, is that local residents will have to pay a fare to use it, as opposed to being able to use the bridge perfectly freely?

Fleur Anderson: I thank the hon. Member for mentioning a disadvantage of the ferry. I am concerned that that the taskforce will say, “We've done the ferry, and now we are not going to fix the bridge.” Putney residents are concerned about that.

A proposal to build a temporary truss bridge inside the current bridge—so, a double-decker bridge—has been given the green light as feasible, and could be built within a year, as soon as it is funded. We need that funding. The “Outline Financial Plan” was developed by Hammersmith and Fulham Council with a series of sector-leading consultants. That plan would not only see Hammersmith bridge repaired, but offer value for money to national and local taxpayers for the long-term.

The “Outline Financial Plan” was submitted on 19 February. I would like to hear whether the Government agree with the plan and are going to get on with it, or do not agree with the plan and are going to come up with one of their own. Either way, we need urgent funding solutions. It is important that these plans are engaged with and taken forward.

To sum up, my asks of the Minister tonight are fivefold. A lot of Putney residents and constituents from across south-west London will be listening tonight. First, the Government must urgently provide up-front funding for the temporary bridge, so that the original bridge can be restored and re-opened as soon as possible and the traffic diverted out of Putney High Street. Secondly, they must drop the requirement for Hammersmith and Fulham Council to provide 50% of the funding—that is not feasible, and the Minister knows it.

Thirdly, the Government must expedite action on the funding proposals submitted by Hammersmith and Fulham Council on 19 February; they present workable and realistic ways forward and must not be left to simply sit and gather dust. Fourthly, I would like reassurance that the taskforce will start delivering and co-operating, so

[Fleur Anderson]

that Hammersmith and Fulham and Richmond Councils, Transport for London and the Government work together to come up with urgent solutions. Fifthly, I ask that the Secretary of State and the leader of the Government taskforce meet me and other concerned parliamentary colleagues as a matter of urgency.

Enough talk. Our constituents want action. The Government know what they need to do. It is time they delivered on the funding agreement to finance the temporary bridge urgently and the restoration and re-opening of Hammersmith bridge.

7.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): I congratulate the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) on securing this important debate on funding for the restoration of Hammersmith bridge and on her detailed speech this evening. I agree with her on the issues that she highlighted, setting out the devastating impact on the physical and mental health of residents and local businesses on both sides of the river, due to the long-standing catalogue of failures and lack of action by Hammersmith and Fulham Borough Council.

The hon. Lady led a protest that took place on Easter weekend, and I commend her for doing so. I want to acknowledge her passion for getting the bridge reopened.

Andy Slaughter: Will the Minister give way?

Rachel Maclean: I will just make some progress.

I assure Members that the Government wish to see the bridge reopen as soon as is safely possible. [Interruption.] I will take interventions, but I need to correct a number of inaccurate statements before I do.

We want to make sure that Londoners can move around the capital easily by public transport, through active travel and on our roads and rivers. Therefore we want Hammersmith bridge to be reopened, despite having no statutory responsibilities for the bridge—particularly because it is wholly owned by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The Government have stepped in to try to work collaboratively to find a solution. That is why we established a taskforce in September, led by Baroness Vere, bringing together all the relevant organisations to agree the best way forward and unblock any challenges.

I reiterate that Hammersmith bridge is owned by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. That means that the responsibility for maintaining the bridge and making decisions on its repairs and funding lies solely with the borough and not the Government. It is a travesty that we have got to a situation where the bridge has to be closed altogether, given that the council could have prevented the serious safety concerns through regular repairs and maintenance.

I would like to ensure that Members in the House and those watching are clear about what funding has been provided by the Government and what action has been taken. Since the structure was closed to vehicles in 2019, and to pedestrians, cyclists and river vessels in 2020, funding for maintenance and repairs has come from a variety of sources. The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is the highway authority for the section of the A306 that runs over the bridge, so it has funded the acoustic monitoring and temperature

control systems to the bridge. Those alert the borough to potential changes and allow it to take informed decisions about the safety of the bridge.

I will correct the first inaccuracy that has been stated. As part of the TfL deal on 31 October 2020, the Government ensured that £4 million—much more than a penny—was committed to start immediate mitigation works on Hammersmith Bridge during the 2021 financial year. That has funded the blast cleaning and a visual inspection of the western pedestals, giving the borough a better insight into the condition of the bridge. That is a vital step before any other engineering works can be undertaken. Members and residents need to understand that.

The funding means that risk mitigation works can begin so that the full repair programme is in the best possible position on cost, schedule and technical risk. As well as that, we have made the ferry service a condition of the TfL bridge deal, so that people, prams and bikes can cross the river safely.

Andy Slaughter: Will the Minister give way?

Rachel Maclean: I want to address one further inaccuracy. If I have time after that, I will take an intervention.

As with any local infrastructure project, the Government expect the local authority to take the lead in promoting the scheme. We have heard from the leader of the council, who does not believe that the borough has the capital funds available to meet the costs of repairing the bridge. Indeed, on several occasions he has said that his residents are not users of the bridge and should therefore not be liable for the works.

In discussions with the leader of the council and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, various options for contributions for funding the project have been discussed. Unfortunately, the council seems to look to the national Government with gold-tinted lenses, not understanding that we cannot and will not hand out a blank cheque for the works. How would that be fair to taxpayers up and down the country and to those who have been responsible, such as the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan)? This is what councils all over the country have to do when they are carrying out major infrastructure works.

Sarah Olney: Will the Minister give way?

Rachel Maclean: I am afraid I cannot, because I need to clarify a number of inaccuracies.

It has been reported in the press by the hon. Member for Putney that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has asked the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham to contribute 50% of the cost. That option was discussed. All that was requested of the borough was that the leader send a plan for the borough's funding proposal. So far, the so-called bids that have been sent in amount to nothing more than letters asking for an unsubstantiated amount. It is simply not appropriate to ask for funding from central Government on that basis. The Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham should have taken the time to understand what is required to submit a bid to the Government. We stand ready to help. There is plenty of help available for officials to put these bids together, but that has not been happening.

When evaluating any temporary crossing solution, the complexity of procurement and requirement of various consents must be considered. Given these challenges, the borough and the taskforce determined that a ferry service would provide an immediately available alternative river crossing for pedestrians and cyclists. That has been provided and we are very grateful to the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames for its support.

The closure of the bridge has affected not just those who need to cross it, but those who travel along the river beneath it. The taskforce is an essential first step. Contrary to statements earlier, the taskforce has met regularly. It stands ready to meet any Member who would like to meet my noble Friend Baroness Vere in the other place; she is more than happy to discuss in full the detailed complexities that we cannot possibly air in a 30-minute debate in a political environment such as we have here tonight.

These are serious and complex engineering works. I am afraid that it is completely inaccurate to make the point in this House that there is no action from the Government. I will not stand here and let Opposition Members say that. We have taken on additional responsibilities—well over and above our statutory responsibilities—as Opposition Members know. We have gone out of our way to help.

Andy Slaughter: I am most grateful to the Minister for giving way. We need £4 million towards investigation work and there is a bill of over £140 million for repairs. Where does the Minister think that money is going to come from? She knows that it cannot come from TfL or from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Her speech will be greeted with absolute dismay by people across London and beyond who use this major arterial route. The issue is simply not being addressed, after two years. It is a wholly irresponsible position for the Government to take. Where is that £140 million going to come from?

Rachel Maclean: I suggest to the hon. Member that his comments tonight are wholly irresponsible, because they have not reflected the work on the Government side to engage constructively with the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham in order to understand its funding position and what it can afford. The borough has not come back on any of the engagements and discussions that we have extended to it regarding realistic sums of money. If it cannot afford that amount of money, it should come back and tell us what it can afford. That is how infrastructure projects up and down the country are conducted. The hon. Member knows that very well.

Sarah Olney: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. She referred earlier to fairness to taxpayers. Does she think that this is fair to the taxpayers of Richmond upon Thames, who are the most affected by this bridge

closure? Their lives are being ruined, their businesses are closing, they cannot get to school or work, they cannot access medical services, and they have no say over what the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham does with its budget, but they understand that £140 million is more than that borough can afford. They are looking to the Government for assistance, and all they ask for is a commitment for the funding. The Minister stands here and talks about all the administrative barriers that are in the way. All we ask for is a commitment.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. It is not fair to taxpayers in any part of the country that that London borough should think that, due to its lack of a maintenance programme on this bridge over the years, people from outside the borough should be expected to stump up for its failure and incompetence. No, it is not fair to them.

In summary, as we have heard tonight, the closure of the bridge has affected not just those who need to cross it but those who travel along the river beneath it. The taskforce has enabled an agreement between the Port of London authority and the borough to allow limited and controlled river transits from 12 April when work is not being undertaken on the bridge. That is a very important point. It is welcome news for commercial river users, who can now continue operations as national lockdown restrictions ease.

Ruth Cadbury: Will the Minister give way?

Rachel Maclean: In a moment. I have given way several times already.

I reassure Members that the Department continues to work closely with all parties involved to reach a funding solution that is fair to national taxpayers. As I have said many times, there are demands on the public purse from all over the country for all kinds of things.

We must ensure that this bridge is reopened as soon as is safely possible. In all genuineness, I encourage the Members on the Opposition Benches to work constructively with the local council to get it to engage with the Government, who are going outside their statutory responsibilities to help to get this bridge reopened so that commuters, people listening tonight, residents on both sides of the Thames, users of the river, emergency services and wider businesses can make use of the crossing and ease pressures on Putney and Chiswick bridges.

We cannot do any more without a detailed funding solution. The buck stops with Hammersmith and Fulham. It needs to present that case to the Government and then we can take action.

Question put and agreed to.

7.42 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	Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
		Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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
Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Con)	Chris Elmore
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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
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)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Owen Thompson
Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Ben Everitt	Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese (Slough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore	Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Ben Lake	George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew	Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Ben Lake
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Heapey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Alistair Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Owen Thompson
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)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson
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	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Owen Thompson
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Jim McMahan (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew		

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore	Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore	Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael	Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Abena Opong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)	Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson	Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson
Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Antony Higginbotham	Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
		Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Mark Harper
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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
James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew	Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Written Statements

Wednesday 14 April 2021

TREASURY

Mortgage Guarantee Scheme: Notification of Contingent Liability

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

It is normal practice when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 and for which there is no statutory authority, for the Minister concerned:

to present a departmental minute to Parliament, giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and

to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

I am writing to notify Parliament of a contingent liability that has been created by the Government from the introduction of the new mortgage guarantee scheme. The scheme will be open to new mortgages submitted by participating lenders from 19 April 2021, but the liability will not be incurred until lenders start to submit mortgages to the scheme, which is not expected until May at the earliest.

By way of background, the mortgage guarantee scheme was announced at the Budget on 3 March 2021. The scheme will provide a guarantee to lenders across the UK who offer mortgages to people with a deposit of 5% on homes with a value of up to £600,000. Under the scheme all buyers will have the opportunity to fix their initial mortgage rate for at least five years should they wish to. The scheme, which will be available for new mortgages up to 31 December 2022, will increase the availability of mortgages on new or existing properties for those with small deposits. The guarantee will be valid for up to seven years after the mortgage is originated.

Exposure against this contingent liability would take place in the event that the sum of commercial fees paid by lenders would not be sufficient to cover calls on the guarantee. There will be a cap on the size of the Government's contingent liability under the scheme of £3.9 billion.

Authority for any expenditure required under this liability will be sought through the normal procedure. HM Treasury has approved this proposal.

I will also lay a minute today on this matter.

[HCWS915]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Events Research Programme: Cancellation Compensation

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): I am tabling this statement for the benefit of all Members of this House to bring to their attention the departmental minute issued today

that provides the House with notice of a series of small contingent liabilities created by my Department. This is in relation to a policy to compensate event organisers participating in phase one of the events research programme in the event of their cancellation if public health concerns were to give rise.

The events research programme is running its first phase of 10-15 pilots in April and May to inform decisions around the safe removal of social distancing at step four of the roadmap. The pilots will be run across a range of settings, venues and activities so that findings will support the full reopening of similar settings across multiple sectors.

The Government will provide compensation on a discretionary basis to event organisers should a pilot event be cancelled due to public health reasons.

This compensation will be capped at £300,000 per event and will cover costs incurred in relation to participation in the programme only (e.g. admission of spectators), recognising the fact that these events would have taken place in line with roadmap restrictions should the programme not exist. In the case of the Liverpool events, as these have been put on specifically as part of the programme, the Government will compensate organisers in full should an event be cancelled, but this will be capped at £300,000 in total across the Liverpool events.

The Government do not intend to cancel any event in the programme. However, public safety comes first and therefore it is prudent to provide this assurance to the organisers assisting the Government in reopening the economy.

A copy of the departmental minute is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS916]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Covid-19 Vaccination Update

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I wish to inform the House of actions we are taking to improve uptake of vaccines across the adult social care sector.

In February 2021, we published the UK covid-19 vaccines delivery plan setting out the significant programme of work under way to drive vaccine uptake, including actions to improve access and to address the concerns of those who may be hesitant to receive the vaccine.

We have been working to make the vaccination accessible to people living and working in care homes. Vaccination teams have visited all older-age care homes in England and are running a minimum four-visit schedule for each. For those workers who may not have been present when the vaccination team visited the home, access via other vaccination services has been available. We also opened the national booking service for seven weeks so that frontline social care workers could book their own appointments, and care home workers can now arrange vaccination directly through their GP.

We have worked hard to address concerns among the adult social care workforce by delivering an extensive communications programme, running targeted advertisements and issuing a stakeholder toolkit containing regularly updated Q and As, guidance and communications materials.

Positive messaging using influencers, leaders and care home workers who have already been vaccinated has boosted confidence and tackled misinformation, as have briefings with different faith groups who have become ambassadors for getting a vaccine.

We continue to do everything we can to increase vaccine uptake. We have targeted support at older adult care homes where vaccine uptake is low, such as in London. As of 4 April 2021, vaccine uptake among eligible workers in older adult care homes in London is 68%, compared to 82% in the south west. Local efforts, by employers, local authorities, public health teams and others, supplement this Government's support.

Despite efforts, vaccine uptake among care home workers is not consistently at the level that we know from SAGE advice is needed to minimise the risk of outbreak: a minimum vaccination rate of 80% of staff and of 90% of residents in each home—that level must be maintained. Only 53% of older adult homes in England are currently meeting this recommendation.

It is imperative that together we now take every step necessary to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to those most at risk from covid-19 and those who care for them. We must protect people living in care homes, and we must protect the workforce who perform such a vital role.

Vaccination is a safe, effective way of preventing the spread of covid-19. It is therefore right that the Government act now to ensure that those working and assisting in older adult care homes are vaccinated to protect everyone in these settings.

From today, we are consulting on taking steps to require care providers to deploy only staff who have been vaccinated within older adult care homes. This measure would be intended to protect the people most at risk in our society—around 90% of those who died from covid-19 were people over 70.

Making vaccination a condition of deployment in older adult care homes in this way would help to further protect older people living in care homes, who are among the most vulnerable to covid-19, and ultimately save lives. A five-week consultation launches today to help inform decision making around how the change could be implemented and whether respondents think it will be beneficial. This will include areas such as potential impact on staff, safety and who could be exempt. Staff, providers, stakeholders, residents and their families are being urged to take part to have their views heard with an outcome expected by this summer.

I will provide an update to the House, following the completion of the consultation.

[HCWS917]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Domestic Abuse Bill

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): This Thursday—15 April—the House of Commons will consider the Lords amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill available on the following link <https://publications.parliament.uk/>

[pa/bills/cbill/58-01/0281/200281.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-01/0281/200281.pdf). As we are approaching the end of the Session and further consideration of this Bill is likely to proceed at pace, I am issuing this written statement to set out for the benefit of MPs, peers and others the Government's position on the various Lords amendments.

The Domestic Abuse Bill will be a groundbreaking piece of legislation. Building on the strong suite of measures already in the Bill as agreed by the House of Commons, the Government proudly welcome many of the Lords amendments (namely, amendments 4 to 8, 10 to 32, 34 to 36, 39 and 44 to 82 and 84 to 86) and worked closely with peers to achieve them. In particular, we support the Lords amendments:

creating a new offence of non-fatal strangulation (Lords amendment 36);

extending the offence of disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress (known as the “revenge porn” offence) to cover threats to disclose intimate images (Lords amendment 35);

extending the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse (Lords amendment 34);

stopping vexatious family proceedings that can further traumatise victims by clarifying the circumstances in which a court may make a barring order under section 91(14) of the Children Act 1989 (Lords amendment 32); and

prohibiting GPs and other health professionals from charging a victim of domestic abuse for a letter to support an application for legal aid (Lords amendment 39).

In addition, as further evidence of our commitment to community-based services, the Government have committed to consult on the provision of community-based domestic abuse services in the upcoming victims' law consultation to be launched this summer.

We have also listened closely to concerns about misogyny and attitudes towards women and girls, and will ask police forces in England and Wales to record, on an experimental basis, any crimes of violence against the person, including stalking and harassment, and sexual offences where the victim perceives it to have been motivated by a hostility based on their sex.

That being said, there are other amendments made in the House of Lords which the Government are unable to support (that is, amendments 1 to 3, 9, 33, 37, 38, 40 to 43 and 83). These amendments apply to England and Wales only.

Abuse by carers (Lords amendments 1 to 3)

We fully recognise that abuse of disabled people perpetrated by carers is wholly unacceptable and needs to be tackled along with all other forms of abuse. The Government's definition includes husbands, wives, partners and relatives who act as “carer” for the victim whom they abuse.

These amendments, however, would bring the relationship between a disabled person and a paid or volunteer carer who is not a partner or relative within the meaning of “personally connected”. Extending the scope of the Bill in this way would undermine the common understanding of domestic abuse. Central to this understanding is the manipulation of the emotional bond between intimate partners or family members.

Further, the Government's approach is consistent with international definitions. The explanatory report to the Istanbul convention declares that domestic abuse or violence covers “intimate-partner violence between

current or former spouses or partners and inter-generational violence which typically occurs between parents and children”.

Nevertheless, we are determined to act on the concerns that have been raised in this debate. Accordingly, we are pleased to announce that as part of the Government’s ongoing commitment in this sphere, the Home Office and Department of Health and Social Care, with input from the Ministry of Justice and Cabinet Office, will undertake a review to examine the protections against carer abuse and the support available to victims. The review will apply to England.

Judicial training (Lords amendment 33)

The Government acknowledge the importance of effective domestic abuse training for judges and magistrates involved in family proceedings. Training in domestic abuse for the judiciary is a priority and is included in all family law courses run by the Judicial College both for newly appointed judges and magistrates and as part of their continuous professional development.

Judicial training on domestic abuse is kept under constant review and is updated to reflect key developments. The senior judiciary (including the president of the family division and chair of the Judicial College), have already made clear commitments to further develop domestic abuse training, taking into account this Bill, as well as the recommendations of the harm panel report, and findings from the four recent Court of Appeal judgments in domestic abuse cases (handed down on 30 March).

While the Lord Chancellor will continue to support the judiciary in this area, the provision of training is properly a matter for the Lord Chief Justice, as head of the judiciary, working through the Judicial College. By conferring functions on the Lord Chancellor in relation to judicial training this amendment is fundamentally at odds with the constitutional principle of judicial independence.

Reasonable force in domestic abuse cases and statutory defence of previous domestic abuse (Lords amendments 37,38 and 83)

The Government understand the motivation behind these amendments, but we are clear that the existing full and partial defences are sufficient.

Full defences, such as self-defence, are defences to any crime which, if pleaded successfully, result in acquittal. In the circumstances of domestic abuse, the partial defences relating to “loss of control” or diminished responsibility can also be argued. Additionally, the fact that an accused is also a victim of domestic abuse will be considered throughout the criminal justice system process from the police investigation through to any Crown Prosecution Service charging decision, to defences deployed at trial under the existing law and as a mitigating factor in sentencing.

Moreover, these amendments are open to abuse by those seeking to evade justice, including potentially by a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

Migrant victims (Lords amendments 40,41 and 43)

We agree that all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of their immigration status, should be treated first and foremost as victims and that they should not be deterred from seeking support. We have emphasised this throughout the passage of the Bill.

To recap, migrant victims of domestic abuse who live here on a spousal visa receive help and support through the destitute domestic violence concession scheme. For those victims who are on other types of visa, such as student, visitor or work visas, or who are here illegally, and who are not eligible for existing support schemes such as the national referral mechanism, we have announced a pilot support scheme. The game-changing £1.5 million support for migrant victims scheme will provide access to safe accommodation and specialist services for these victims, who have previously not been eligible for other support. As well as providing immediate support within safe accommodation for those who need it, our new scheme will also provide us with clearer evidence of the needs of victims, so that we can build a sustainable programme of support.

Migrant victims should not be treated as a homogeneous group with similar, if not identical, circumstances and needs. We want our longer-term work to recognise migrant victims as individuals with complex and diverse needs. The scheme for migrant victims will help achieve this.

In relation to data sharing, we are committed to considering existing data-sharing procedures following the publication, on 17 December 2020, of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services’ (HMICFRS) report in response to a super-complaint about the police sharing immigration data. HMICFRS recommended that the Home Office conduct a review of the legal and policy framework governing the sharing of information about vulnerable victims of crime, including domestic abuse, and to report on the outcome of the review within six months. We have accepted this recommendation and the review is now underway. This amendment pre-empts the completion of that review which we have commenced in good faith.

Accreditation of child contact centres (Lords amendment 9)

The Government recognise that provision of child contact centres is vital in supporting families and enabling parents to have contact with their children and that these must provide a safe environment for children and parents alike. The existing regulatory framework ensures that this is the case.

High level data provided by the National Association of Child Contact Centres indicates there are up to 400 contact centres, fewer than 15% of which may be unaccredited. However, this figure includes contact centres which may be commissioned by local authorities and which are already subject to extensive safeguarding provision and regulation.

In private law family cases, the judiciary and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) have protocols in place to ensure that they only refer parties to child contact centres accredited by the National Association of Child Contact Centres.

In public law family cases, where children are in the care of the local authority, or under their supervision, comprehensive statutory provisions are already in place and emphasise that contact should not undermine the welfare and safeguarding of children. All plans and decisions regarding contact, including the use of contact centres or services, are made by social workers on a case-by-case basis, with detailed safeguarding risk assessments and taking full account of any child protection plan and/or contact order. All local authority activity in

relation to child contact must be in the best interests of the child and subject to the relevant statutory provisions, including sections 22 and 34 of the Children Act 1989, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014.

We are also concerned that the definition of contact services would be so broad, that it may create duplicative burdens on a wide range of local authority services, which goes beyond child contact centres.

Management of perpetrators (Lords amendment 42)

The Government agree that high-harm domestic abuse perpetrators need to be effectively monitored and supervised. The current legislation in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 already provides for serial and high harm domestic abuse offenders to be managed under multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) on either an automatic or discretionary basis. Adding a new category of offenders automatically eligible for MAPPA would add complexity to those arrangements without delivering clear benefits.

There is already significant work in train to improve the operation of MAPPA. As well as strengthening the statutory guidance that supports MAPPA, we are pleased to announce the envelopment of a new multi-agency public protection system (MAPPS). MAPPS, as a modern and efficient subject management system, will facilitate more effective and automated information sharing between MAPPA responsible authorities and their partner agencies, thereby improving the multi-agency risk management of all offenders managed under MAPPA, including those domestic abuse perpetrators whose risk is such that they need to be managed under the MAPPA framework. The target is for the new system to be piloted in 2022. Once MAPPS is deployed, it will allow ViSOR (the existing subject management system) to be decommissioned. In addition, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill includes provisions to further strengthen the legal framework governing information-sharing between MAPPA partners and others.

In relation to a domestic abuse perpetrator strategy, we have already committed to bringing forward such a strategy later this year as part of the domestic abuse strategy.

We have tabled Government amendments to enshrine this commitment in law (Government amendments 42 (a) to (c)).

Tackling domestic abuse is a key priority for the Prime Minister and this Government. Our landmark Domestic Abuse Bill will help to better protect and support victims and their children and bring perpetrators to justice.

[HCWS918]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Covid-19 Local Support Measures: Extension

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The covid-19 winter grant scheme has enabled local authorities in England to provide targeted support to families and individuals, keeping them warm and well fed over the winter period, with the principal focus being on disadvantaged children.

The initial scheme was issued at £170 million and was due to conclude at the end of March 2021. In the first two months of the scheme, covering December 2020 and January 2021, local authorities spent over £86 million, with 94% of that awarded to support families with children and 96% used on the provision of food and support with utility bills. In the same period, nearly 2.4 million awards had been made to vulnerable households through the scheme. The scheme was subsequently extended with an additional £59.1 million of support and was due to conclude this Friday, 16 April.

Recognising that some restrictions on the economy continue, we are extending the scheme until 20 June 2021 with funding of £40 million and re-naming it the covid-19 local support grant. This brings the scheme into line with the Prime Minister's road map out of lockdown as on 21 June, provided we continue to pass the four steps needed to progress through the road map, most of the remaining restrictions will be lifted.

All conditions of the grant continue, as does the allocation methodology.

[HCWS914]

Petition

Wednesday 14 April 2021

OBSERVATIONS

TREASURY

Bank closures in North Ayrshire

The petition of the constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran,

Declares that there is an urgent need to tackle the exodus of high street banks from North Ayrshire; expresses extreme concern about the recent decision by TSB Bank to close its branches in Kilbirnie, Largs and Saltcoats; notes that seven of the ten towns in the constituency of North Ayrshire & Arran – namely West Kilbride, Dalry, Ardrossan, Stevenston, Beith, and now Kilbirnie are now without any high street bank, making it one of the worst hit constituencies in the UK for bank branch closures; declares that many high street businesses are adversely impacted by bank branch closures, as they face increased insurance costs without local access to night safes to deposit cash at the end of the business day; further declares that local communities, particularly elderly and disabled residents who are more likely to face digital exclusion, will suffer because of these decisions which increasingly force consumers to bank online; and further expresses deep disappointment that customers feel they have no choice but to accept online banking, however reluctantly or endure lengthy journeys in order to effectively manage their money.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the UK Government to work in partnership with the banking industry to deliver banking hubs for communities to ensure financial inclusion for all.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patricia Gibson, *Official Report*, Tuesday 3 November 2020; Vol. 683, c. 285.]

[P002618]

Observation from The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

The Government thank the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for submitting a petition opposing a bank branch closure on behalf of her constituents.

The Government are sorry to hear of her constituents' disappointment at the planned closure of the TSB branches in Kilbirnie, Largs and Saltcoats. The way consumers interact with their banking is changing. In recent years, two-thirds of UK adults have used contactless payments, 72% have used online banking and 48% have used mobile banking, according to UK Finance. The Government cannot reverse the changes in the market and in customer behaviour; nor can they determine firms' commercial strategies in response to those changes. Having the flexibility to respond to changes in the market is what makes the UK's financial services sector one of the most competitive and productive in the world, and the Government want to protect that.

As with other banking service providers, TSB needs to balance customer interests, market competition, and other commercial factors when considering its strategy. Although I can understand the constituents' dissatisfaction, decisions on opening and closing branches are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis. The Government hope hon. Members can appreciate that it would be inappropriate for the Government to intervene in these decisions.

However, the Government firmly believe that the impact of branch closures should be understood, considered, and mitigated where possible so that all customers, wherever they live, continue to have access to over the counter banking services.

As the hon. Member may know, the major high street banks signed up to the Access to Banking Standard in May 2017, which commits them to ensure customers are well informed about branch closures, the bank's reasons for closure and options for continued access to banking services. Alternative options for access might include the Post Office which allows 95% of business and 99% of personal banking customers to carry out their everyday banking at 11,500 post office branches in the UK.

In September 2020, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) published guidance setting out its expectation of firms when they are deciding to reduce the number of physical branches or the number of free-to-use ATMs. Firms are expected to carefully consider the impact of a planned closure on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs, and other relevant branch services and consider possible alternative access arrangements. This will ensure the implementation of closure decisions is done in a way that treats customers fairly.

The petition requests that the Government work in partnership with the banking industry to deliver banking hubs for communities to ensure financial inclusion for all. While banks do have to comply with competition law, there is no specific regulation that prevents them from sharing branches or other premises where their interests require. The Government do not intervene in these commercial decisions, but will continue to encourage banks to think creatively about how they can ensure that consumers can access a wide range of banking services on a sustainable basis.

The Government note the concern for constituents who face digital exclusion. The Government understand that to have a world-leading digital economy we must ensure that as many people as possible can reap the benefits of being online and the technologies that can transform our lives, benefit society and drive prosperity and growth. There are a number of organisations that can help the elderly navigate the online world:

The online centres network, which is made up of over 5,000 organisations based at the heart of hyper-local communities, all working together to tackle digital and social exclusion by providing people with the skills and confidence they need to access digital technology. Constituents can find their local online centre at: <https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/ournetwork/find-centre#/map>

Age UK also provides help with technology and the internet, and has guides to help people stay safe online and to make the most of the internet. Age UK provide training courses which explain things without technical jargon to get people online. To access these services, constituents can call the Age UK advice line on 0800 055 6112. More information on how to find help is available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/services/>

The Government cannot intervene in firms' commercial strategies in response to changes in the market. However, the Government understand that access to physical banking continues to be important to many communities

and will continue to work with industry, the Post Office and the FCA to ensure everyone continues to have access to essential banking services.

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