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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 21 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

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Northern Ireland Protocol: Trade with Great Britain

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What recent assessment his Department has made of the effect of the Northern Ireland protocol on levels of trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. [914354]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): Before I answer, let me say that I am sure the whole House will join me in offering my support and thoughts to the Police Service of Northern Ireland officer who was subject to a cowardly attack earlier this week. Those who attack our public servants and emergency services personnel have nothing to offer the communities they claim to represent. I am sure the whole community will join everybody across this House in support for that officer and for such a way forward, and people will I hope come forward with any information they may have to help bring those responsible to justice swiftly.

Overall freight flow between Great Britain and Northern Ireland has returned to normal levels. We are continuing to monitor and assess the situation, including any potential change in trade patterns. The temporary operational steps that we announced in this House in March have ensured that we prevented any significant immediate-term disruption to goods flows, as I have outlined, including food, and have provided space for the continued discussions on the protocol implementation in the Joint Committee.

Patricia Gibson: I share the Secretary of State's concern and alarm over recent events.

Pharmaceutical manufacturers and industry leaders are expected to withdraw up to 90% of medicines sent to Northern Ireland from the UK due to the unaffordability of meeting new Brexit-incurred costs and red tape, with Lord Frost stating last week that "difficult issues remain". What do the UK Government plan to do to minimise and prevent further disruption of the distribution of medical supplies to Northern Ireland caused by a hard Brexit?

Brandon Lewis: As I think we showed with the action we took just a month or so ago, which I have outlined, we will ensure that we take the action we need to take to continue to see the flow of goods and products. Obviously, the medicines issue is one we are working on intensively with the European Commission to address, with Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and Lord Frost working at the moment on all of those issues—the outstanding issues—that the hon. Member highlights. There are some difficult issues, but we will do what we need to do, working in partnership with the EU, to get a resolution that works for the whole of the UK.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP) [V]: I join the Secretary of State in condemning unreservedly the attack on the female police officer, and our support is fully with her and her colleagues at this time.

The Secretary of State will be aware of the difficulties that the Northern Ireland protocol continues to cause for both consumers and businesses. What steps are the Government going to take to replace this protocol with arrangements that fully restore Northern Ireland's place within the UK internal market?

Brandon Lewis: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's comments, as I am sure will the Police Service of Northern Ireland for its personnel.

The protocol is about safeguarding Northern Ireland's place in the UK's internal market, as we outlined in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, which legislated for that very fact. I have been very clear that there are outstanding issues with the protocol, and some of them are difficult issues. They are ones that need to be resolved from the point of view of both consumers and businesses, and just to restore confidence across all the communities—the whole community—of Northern Ireland. We are determined to do that, and I think we have shown with the actions we have taken that we want to do that in a pragmatic, flexible way that works for the people of Northern Ireland. We are also working, through the work Lord Frost is doing, to do that in partnership with our colleagues and friends in the EU. Ultimately, however, this is about making sure that we are protecting the Good Friday agreement in all of its strands.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: The Secretary of State will also be aware that there is potential for significant difficulties with the supply of medicines to Northern Ireland as a result of the protocol. Again I ask the Secretary of State: what measures do the Government intend to introduce to ensure that medicines flow freely into Northern Ireland, and that everyone here in Northern Ireland will not be disadvantaged in accessing medicines and pharmaceutical products?

Brandon Lewis: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point, which of course we are working on and take seriously. The recitals to the protocol themselves state that it

"should impact as little as possible on the everyday life of communities",

and very clearly, as well as food supplies, medicines absolutely fall within that. So it is well within the remit of the protocol to ensure that that flow can continue in the proper and flexible way it always has. We continue

to work intensively with our friends and partners in the EU, but as I have said before, we will do what we need to do to ensure that Northern Ireland has access to the market in the way it would as part of the United Kingdom. That is what the structural integrity of the United Kingdom's internal customs union is about.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): Can I echo the comments of the Secretary of State on the despicable attempted murder of a serving police officer? All my thoughts are with the officer, her colleagues and her family today.

As recently as Monday, when wider protests over the Northern Ireland protocol resumed, anonymous social media accounts were still being used to exploit the situation and lure young people to the interface in Belfast, with provocative messages inflaming an already tense situation. Will the Secretary of State, working with the police, make it clear in the strongest possible terms that social media giants such as Facebook have a responsibility to act to prevent their platforms from being exploited to inflame tensions in the interface communities?

Brandon Lewis: Yes, and I welcome the hon. Lady's comments. I think it actually—I hope Members excuse the colloquial language—beggars belief that anybody could think that the cowardly act of putting a police officer and a young child at risk is a way to further their cause. I warmly welcome the condemnation all around of that cowardly action.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right: as I outlined in the statement I made last week, it is important that we are very alert to the risks of social media. People who look at social media should be alert to who may or may not be behind encouraging them to do things in a hugely inappropriate way that could ruin their lives and the lives of others. Yes, this is something we are taking forward and working on with social media companies—absolutely.

Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP) [V]: The Social Democratic and Labour party sends every good wish to the PSNI officer, after the appalling experience she has had at the hands of the warped throwbacks who have absolutely nothing to offer people here.

We appreciate that sanitary and phytosanitary checks are a tricky issue internally for the Conservative party, but as the person in government in charge of speaking up for Northern Ireland, has the Secretary of State personally articulated to his Cabinet colleagues how the UK-EU veterinary and SPS arrangements could address the frictions in trade? Has he directly asked them to put the interests of Northern Ireland ahead of a theoretical power to diverge that the UK does not look as if it is going to use any time soon?

Brandon Lewis: I appreciate the hon. Lady's comments as, I am sure, does the PSNI.

Obviously, I am always making the case in the UK Government for the best outcome for people in Northern Ireland, and it is right that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom in terms of trade. As I have said, SPS checks in one form or another, recognising the single epidemiological unit and biosecurity of the island of Ireland, have been in place since about the 19th century. We must ensure that we have a proper,

pragmatic, flexible, free flow of goods, so that a consumer in Northern Ireland is able to have the same experience as a member of the United Kingdom anywhere in the United Kingdom. We are determined to ensure that we deliver that.

Recent Disorder

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): What steps the Government are taking to tackle the causes of the recent disorder in Northern Ireland. [914355]

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking in response to the recent disorder in Northern Ireland. [914369]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): The sporadic localised disorder that we have seen in Northern Ireland is completely unacceptable, and I appreciate the comments made by the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) in that regard over the past couple of weeks. The factors behind that disorder are complex and, as I have said, multifaceted. All communities in Northern Ireland must work together to resolve current tensions and unrest. I have been in regular close contact with political and community leaders, as well as with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and it is clear that, as we know in this House, the only way to resolve differences is through dialogue. In that regard, we all have the ability to lead the way by example.

Stephen Farry [V]: I join colleagues in expressing full solidarity with the police officer affected this week. It is important always to remain united in opposing terrorism. Does the Secretary of State recognise that there is a trade-off between the nature of the UK's Brexit, and the level of checks down the Irish sea as a consequence? The UK Government can play a key role in defusing those tensions if, like many other sovereign states, they follow through and negotiate that bespoke agreement.

Brandon Lewis: As I outlined in a statement last week, and as I have just said, the tensions and issues that led to violence a couple of weeks ago are multifaceted and, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, a number of issues are going on. I would be wary of putting this on any one issue, or of giving anyone the view that it is acceptable to argue that, because of tensions over the protocol, it is acceptable to use violence. There is much more to what happened the other week than that. As I have said, we want to work towards a practical pragmatic solution with our partners in the EU, to ensure we have that good, free and flexible flow of products between Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the way we want, and as we deliver from Northern Ireland to Great Britain.

Andrew Gwynne [V]: I agree with the Secretary of State that the reasons behind the violence are multifaceted, but the barriers to trade, which the Prime Minister repeatedly and wrongly denied existed, have played a part in the growing political instability in Northern Ireland. We need solutions. Will the Secretary of State do what he did not do in last week's statement and confirm that his Government are seeking an agreement on common veterinary standards? That would go a long way to lowering barriers to trade in food products across the Irish sea.

Brandon Lewis: We are working intensely with our partners and colleagues in the European Union. Lord Frost is currently working with Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič on a wide range of issues, including agrifoods, so that we get a resolution that works for the people of Northern Ireland, with Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we have seen an increase in tensions, particularly in Unionist communities, and we need to recognise the issues around a sense of identity. We can all play a part in helping the EU to understand better the lasting impact of the action it took when it went to trigger article 16 just a couple of months ago. The disruption affects people across all communities in Northern Ireland, and we want that to be resolved in partnership with the EU.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) [V]: May I associate myself, as others have, with the remarks that the Secretary of State made with regard to the horrible and horrific event yesterday in Dungiven? That and recent scenes remind us all too well of the horrors of the past and surely must reinvigorate us all to ensure that they do not become either endemic to the present or part of Northern Ireland's future.

Will the Secretary of State assure me that the PSNI has adequate resourcing to proactively interrupt social media platforms and posts, which are clearly the new way of communicating types of disorder? The PSNI needs to be able to monitor and intervene. Can he assure me that the full resource of the state is available to it to ensure that this important work is done to the best of its abilities?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee makes a very important point, as others have, about the impact and importance of dealing with social media. Yes, absolutely: I have spoken to the chief constable and outlined to him our full support and we are working with the police to ensure that they have access to the full capabilities to work and deal with social media issues. We obviously recognise that policing is a devolved matter, but they have our full support and we will continue to work with them on those issues.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): May I, too, associate myself with the comments about, and send our best wishes to, the serving police officer? As a former special constable, I know that the whole police family will be reeling today, and my thoughts are with them all.

It is not an exaggeration to say that, in the 23 years since the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, the peace process has never been as vulnerable as it is now. The north-south institutions fundamental to the support of Irish nationalists are under pressure, and the east-west relationship has been seriously undermined by the Prime Minister and his approach to Brexit. The Secretary of State bears a responsibility to help stabilise the situation, so will he ensure that the British-Irish Council is urgently convened to give Northern Ireland representatives a voice in discussions around the protocol and huge decisions about their own future?

Brandon Lewis: Yes. I suggest that the hon. Lady looks back: a while ago, we announced that the British-Irish Council would meet on 11 June. It continues its regular meetings, which have never stopped; the last one was in November. But yes—as it has been regularly meeting.

Louise Haigh: I suggest that 11 June is not an urgent meeting and recommend that that meeting should be brought forward urgently to discuss these important issues.

The Secretary of State will know that some very young children, born long after the Good Friday agreement, have been involved in some of the recent disorder. Does he agree that, wherever appropriate, working with the PSNI, restorative justice should be used to ensure that those children are not criminalised and do not run the risk of falling into the toxic, coercive grip of paramilitaries?

Brandon Lewis: Yes, absolutely. I will also just say that the Northern Ireland Executive have been involved in the specialist committee, which feeds into the Joint Committee, through the work that we do through the engagement forums and, actually, a meeting with Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič just a few weeks ago. They are consistently involved and feeding into the process and the work that we do with the EU, but as I say, the British-Irish Council date was set a short while ago.

On the hon. Lady's comments about young people, she is absolutely right; I fully support that point. Community groups and youth groups have been working with young people, not just in the last few weeks but consistently over the last year or so. They do amazing work to help young people to see a way through to a prosperous and exciting future. We should all be doing all we can to support, promote and encourage that so that people are not tempted, whether through social media or through bad advice in the heat of the moment in the streets, as we saw a few weeks ago, into the type of behaviour that gives them a criminal record and curtails their opportunities for the future.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): May I take this opportunity to associate myself and my party with the comments that have been made on both sides of the House about the disgraceful and despicable attempt on the life of a serving police officer in Dungiven on Monday?

In these times of heightened tensions in the community, language and leadership matter, so does the Secretary of State consider that the Prime Minister's referring to the "ludicrous" barriers that result from the protocol—a protocol that he himself insisted on the terms of—are a help or a hindrance to reaching a solution in Northern Ireland that all parts of the community can accept?

Brandon Lewis: I am afraid the hon. Gentleman betrayed a lack of understanding, in the sense that people of the whole community of Northern Ireland are affected by these problems and the outworkings of the protocol. Whether it is somebody who has a nationalist constitutional view or a Unionist constitutional view, the practical outworkings for both consumers and businesses are real for the whole community. There is an added sense, as I outlined earlier, that the identity of the loyalist Unionist community in Northern Ireland has been affected, so the Prime Minister was absolutely right. It is helpful in that it clearly recognises—the hon. Gentleman sadly does not—the sense of injustice and feeling of attack on identity that is there in the Unionist community. We have to be clear that we recognise that

and want to deal with that with our partners in the EU. To pretend it is not there simply is not going to handle the problem.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): Dissident republicans tried to murder a police officer and her young child in County Derry this week. I take this opportunity, as an Irish nationalist, to send those dissident republicans a very clear message: your quarrel is not with the police, it is not with the British state; it is with the people of Ireland and that is a battle you will never, ever win.

Given the Prime Minister's very speedy response to an issue about football—as important as that is—compared with the quickness of his response to the violence on the streets of Northern Ireland for almost 10 days, does the Secretary of State agree with me that we need an active, engaged and interested Prime Minister in dealing with our peace process?

Brandon Lewis: Yes, absolutely, and I am very proud of the fact that we do. We have a Prime Minister who has been very much engaged. The hon. Gentleman should look at the Prime Minister's comments and the fact that he was talking to the Taoiseach in the early stages. I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks about dissident republicans. The Prime Minister has been actively involved. He has been in full communication all the way through this process. In terms of looking at how people deal with this, I would just say that all Members of this House, including some in the hon. Gentleman's own party, need to think very carefully when they are tweeting things that could be seen as incendiary to make sure we all take the right tone on these matters to ensure we return calm for people as quickly as possible.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP) [V]: Having spoken to my constituent yesterday who was the subject of such a disgraceful attack, I can tell the House that the victim and her family deeply appreciate the unanimous support, and that the wider community in County Londonderry does as well. The Secretary of State has indicated his concern about the rising tensions. Will he take more steps now to understand the activities that are going on, the rationale behind them and the need to stand up to the violence, but also the need to understand and take action to deal with the underlying problems that exist in those areas?

Brandon Lewis: Yes. I think the hon. Gentleman alludes to a wider issue that the previous questioner rightly raised in the statement last week. A multi-faceted set of issues came together over the last few weeks. We should not allow ourselves to miss out on the fact that it is important and highlights why we have to do more work to ensure that, as we are levelling up and building back better across the United Kingdom, that reaches all communities and that all communities can benefit, see opportunities, see growth, and really have a better opportunity for a better and brighter future.

Police Officer Numbers

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): What assessment the Government have made of the potential effect of Budget 2021 on police officer numbers in Northern Ireland. [914356]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Robin Walker): The UK Government fully support the excellent work of the PSNI. I would like to thank all the officers involved in keeping people safe during the recent unrest and send my best wishes to those who were injured, as well as associating myself with the remarks we have heard across the House today about the appalling and cowardly act in Dungiven. Policing in Northern Ireland and police funding are primarily devolved matters. I welcome the further funding allocated to the PSNI by the Executive, which provides the PSNI with an additional £12.3 million for staffing. But how the PSNI allocates its funding is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Matt Western [V]: The Minister will know that 7,500 officers was a core commitment of New Decade, New Approach. Given the vital importance of neighbourhood policing in tackling disorder, what steps will the Government take to ensure that commitment is met?

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman is right: this was a commitment for the parties in the Executive under the New Decade, New Approach announcement. Clearly, the UK Government provide funding to the Executive through the block grant, but the Secretary of State has also spoken to the Chief Constable and made clear that, if he puts together a business plan, we will work with the Department of Justice to make sure that that can be properly supported. We certainly stand ready to support them in that regard.

Leaving the EU: Peace in Northern Ireland

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the UK leaving the EU on peace in Northern Ireland. [914357]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): In the 23 years since the Belfast/Good Friday agreement was signed, there has been a transformative change in Northern Ireland. The hard-won peace has created the conditions for economic growth, investment and stability. As we left the European Union, the protocol was designed to protect the agreement in all of its strands and to safeguard the stability created. It is only by respecting all elements of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement—north-south as well as east-west, and, obviously, Northern Ireland itself—that we will secure strength and stability into the future.

Jamie Stone: My good friend the late Charles Kennedy attended Lochaber High School and Glasgow University. He went on to represent a highlands constituency with distinction for many years. The fact that he was a Roman Catholic was neither here nor there. I would say that Charles Kennedy was an excellent example of integrated education. What more can the UK Government do to assist the Northern Ireland Assembly and Northern Ireland Government in getting integrated education going in the Province and reaping the benefits from it?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important and powerful point, which I absolutely agree with. One of the things in the Belfast/Good Friday agreement that has not managed to be delivered on enough is integrated education. I am absolutely determined for us to do all we can to support the Executive to take

that forward—obviously, education is devolved. As I have outlined in relation to the new deal package of money, it is an area that I am very focused on, and I want to work with the Executive to take integrated education forward over the period ahead for the benefit of the long-term stability, peace and prosperity of people in Northern Ireland.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP) [V]: Would the Secretary of State agree that it is not Brexit or leaving the EU that has had an impact on peace in Northern Ireland, but the Northern Ireland protocol that has been imposed in Northern Ireland by the EU, leaving us in a position where we have not yet got the same terms as the rest of the United Kingdom, leaving us with a trade barrier between east and west? This has meant additional bureaucracy and administration for local businesses and that there are businesses from England that do not wish to engage in the additional checks that are required. What progress is being made to remove this injustice from Northern Ireland, as we feel we are being punished for leaving the EU?

Mr Speaker: Secretary of State, good luck.

Brandon Lewis: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I said earlier, some of the tension that we have seen over the last few weeks is multi-faceted, with a number of issues involved. On the hon. Gentleman's points about the protocol, that is something that we are working through. We are working intensively with our partners in the EU. Lord Frost is working with Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič. We are very much aware that the protocol is there. From the EU's point of view, it wants to protect the sacrosanct position of its single market. We are focused on and determined about protecting the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, as I said before, in all three of its strands, and we are very alert to the fact that east-west is as important as any other strand. We want to make sure that we deliver on that and get a solution that means that this can work in a proper, pragmatic way that means that a consumer, a business and a citizen of Northern Ireland can have the same experience as a citizen anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Recent Disorder

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): What representations he has received from relevant stakeholders on the recent disorder in Northern Ireland. [914359]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): I have been in close conversation with political and community leaders and the Police Service of Northern Ireland in response to recent events. Their unification in condemning the unrest has been a welcome sign that those engaged in the destruction and disorder that we saw do not represent Northern Ireland. We as a Government will continue to engage with stakeholders across the whole community in Northern Ireland to find solutions that work for everybody and to ensure that we are always clear that the right way to express concerns is through dialogue, engagement and the democratic process—never violence.

Kevin Brennan: The Secretary of State is right: dialogue is important, as are inter-Government relations between the UK and Ireland. It is a vital part of upholding the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and managing tension that leads to disorder, so why has the British-Irish

Intergovernmental Conference never met under this Prime Minister, and why has the Prime Minister never chaired the British-Irish Council? Can he commit that he will chair the next meeting, whether it is in June or sooner, as it should be?

Brandon Lewis: The British-Irish Council has never ceased to meet regularly and has always been chaired in the same way. The conversations are ongoing between ourselves and the Irish Government. Even over the last few weeks, whether that has been with Foreign Minister Simon Coveney or the Prime Minister talking to the Taoiseach, that engagement has been ongoing and will continue, because we are partners working together, with a long relationship—a positive relationship—that is of benefit to the people of the Republic of Ireland and the whole of the UK.

Mental Health Services Funding

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): What comparative assessment he has made of the adequacy of levels of funding for mental health services in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. [914363]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Robin Walker): We recognise the importance of ensuring that there is proper provision and access to mental health services right across the UK. Health services are devolved in Northern Ireland. The funding allocated to this specific service is therefore a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive to allocate from within the substantial resources provided by the UK Government. The Government are providing funding of £14.2 billion to the Executive in 2021-22 and we would, of course, support them allocating some of this funding for these vital services.

Rachel Hopkins [V]: Recently published figures show that between January 2017 and September 2020 mental health referral targets were missed more than 42,000 times at emergency departments in Northern Ireland. Given that rates of suicide in Northern Ireland continue to be the highest of any part of the UK, will the Minister please confirm that the funding in New Decade, New Approach to tackle the mental health crisis will be urgently released?

Mr Walker: The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the acute demand on all health services across the UK, including in Northern Ireland, and she is also right to refer to the funding in the NDNA agreement. There was £50 million allocated for mental health support through the confidence and supply agreement. That funding is part of £350 million provided under that agreement to support the health sector, but there is a further £60 million of capital and resource funding for medical purposes that the Government have since announced and approved, and we continue to deliver on our NDNA commitments to the Executive.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

[914524] **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 21 April.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I know that the whole House will want to join me in sending our very best wishes to Her Majesty the Queen on her 95th birthday.

Last night's verdict in Minneapolis delivered justice for the family and friends of George Floyd, and I know that the thoughts of the whole House remain with them.

I welcome the decision taken by the six English football teams not to join the European super league. The announcement was the right result for football fans, for clubs and for communities across the country.

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.

Ronnie Cowan [V]: May I extend my good wishes to the Queen today in what must be a difficult time? I hope that she finds herself surrounded by friends and family and that she can find it within herself to take some time to celebrate her 95th birthday.

I know that the Prime Minister is not a supporter of basic income, but given that Hull, Belfast, Norwich, Leeds, Lambeth, Guildford, Swansea, Glasgow and 24 other councils around the United Kingdom have expressed a desire to run pilot schemes that would enhance our knowledge of all the pros and cons, would he consider facilitating any pilot projects in the United Kingdom? Have the UK Government considered any research into basic income, and if so, what?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his support for a UK-wide proposal. I trust that he understands the irony of that, when we consider that his party is, as I understand it, still hellbent on calling an irresponsible referendum on breaking up the United Kingdom.

[914528] **Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con) [V]:** As we come out of lockdown and look to the summer, many people are going to be concerned about their body image. There are 1.25 million people who suffer from eating disorders and 1 million people using steroids, and the number is getting worse. Two weeks ago, the Women and Equalities Committee released a report on body image, which concluded that the use of

“doctored photos promoting unobtainable or unrepresentative body images was having a ‘detrimental’ impact”.

Will the Prime Minister consider all options, including labelling digitally altered images, to help deal with the issues raised on body image?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important point. He and the whole House are aware of the pressure that young people, in particular, can feel as a result of doctored images. As part of the consultation on the online advertising programme, we will look at what we can do, and I know that we will be responding to the Select Committee's report in due course.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): May I join the Prime Minister in wishing Her Majesty a very happy birthday? The last few weeks have been a time of incredible personal anguish and we all send Her Majesty and the royal family our very best wishes.

May I also join the Prime Minister in his comments about the verdict in the George Floyd case? There has been justice in that case.

Even as an Arsenal season ticket holder, I join the Prime Minister in his comments about the European super league, which would have destroyed football. We now need to get on with the other changes that are necessary.

Finally, Mr Speaker, may I send my condolences to the family of Frank Judd, who died earlier this week? Frank was a much-loved Member of this House and the other place for many decades and was highly respected as a Labour Minister. He was a great internationalist and campaigner for peace and human rights and he will be sadly missed.

What does the Prime Minister think is the right thing to do if he receives a text message from a billionaire Conservative supporter asking him to fix tax rules?

The Prime Minister: First, I echo the right hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks about Frank Judd.

In response to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question, if he is referring to the requests from James Dyson, I make absolutely no apology at all for shifting heaven and earth and doing everything I possibly could—as I think any Prime Minister would in those circumstances—to secure ventilators for the people of this country, to save lives and to roll out a ventilator-procurement process that the Labour-controlled Public Accounts Committee itself said was a benchmark for procurement

Keir Starmer: Let us be clear what the texts show. The Prime Minister was lobbied by a wealthy businessman and close friend for a change in the tax rules; the Prime Minister responded: “I will fix it”. Then, after a discussion with the Chancellor, whom everybody seems to be lobbying these days, the Prime Minister texted his friend to say, “it is fixed”. How many other people with the Prime Minister's personal number has he given preferential treatment to?

The Prime Minister: I recall the right hon. and learned Gentleman saying at the time that we should do everything that we could to get more ventilators. Indeed, he congratulated the roll-out—he said well done to everybody involved in the ventilator challenge.

May I just remind the House of what we were facing in March last year? We had a new virus that was capable of killing people in ways that we did not understand. The only way to help them, in extremis, was to intubate them and put them on ventilation. We had 9,000 ventilators in this country; we secured 22,000 as a result of that ventilator challenge. I think it was entirely the right thing to do to work with all potential makers of ventilators at that time. And by the way, so does the former leader of the Labour party—a man to whom I think the right hon. and learned Gentleman should listen—Tony Blair.

Keir Starmer: I am surprised the Prime Minister brings up former leaders as it is his former leader—his friend Dave—who is at the heart of much of this.

I acknowledge that thousands of businesses stepped up during the pandemic. That was a good thing and we celebrate that. The difference is that they did not all

have the chance to text the Prime Minister to ask him to fix the tax situation in exchange for doing so. That is the difference.

At the heart of this scandal are people's jobs and wasted taxpayers' money. Take, for example, the thousands of jobs at Liberty Steel that are on the line in Hartlepool, Rotherham and elsewhere following the collapse of Greensill Capital. The Prime Minister has not fixed that—in fact, he has done nothing to help steelworkers. Is it now quite literally one rule for those who have the Prime Minister's phone number and another for everybody else?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman calls it a scandal; he voted for the changes that we brought in. He called our ventilator challenge an outstanding success and I think he was completely right. This is a Government who get on, deliver for people in distress and deliver on the people's priorities.

Yes, of course I am concerned for the families of steelworkers up and down the country. That is why the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has been meeting the unions and the management of Liberty Steel repeatedly over the past few days. We believe in British steel. It was under the last Labour Government that jobs in steel fell by more than 50% and output fell by more than 50%. We now have a 5 million-tonne pipeline of British steel, with our massive infrastructure investments, and we intend to use our new freedoms under Brexit to make sure that procurement goes to British companies.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister says, "We believe in British steel". Well, do something. I have to say to him that steelworkers waking up this morning will find it deeply offensive to hear the Prime Minister boasting to his friends that he is the First Lord of the Treasury and can give them the backing they need. He will not give the steelworkers the backing that they need. This shows that, once again, favours, privileged access, and tax breaks for mates are the main currency of this Conservative Government. If that is not the case, if one of the 3 million self-employed people who have been excluded from Government support for over a year and now face bankruptcy texted the Prime Minister to ask for a tax break so that they could survive, would he change the rules for them, too?

The Prime Minister: This Government have supported the self-employed with more than £14 billion throughout the pandemic. That is part of a vast package of support for jobs and livelihoods across the country. We continue to do everything it takes. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should take back what he said about the ventilator challenge. He attacks the ventilator challenge—our efforts to get more ventilators at a very, very difficult time for this country—in the same way, by the way, in which he opportunistically attacked the Vaccine Taskforce at a critical moment, which he will recall. We take the tough decisions that are necessary to protect the people of this country and get things done.

Keir Starmer: If I had to correct the Prime Minister for everything that he gets wrong, I would be here all day. I take it that that is a no as an answer to the question in relation to the 3 million. There we have it:

an open door for those with the Prime Minister's number; a closed door to the 3 million. What this shows once again is the extent of the sleaze and cronyism that is at the heart of his Conservative Government. Let me try another way, Prime Minister. If an NHS nurse, who has been working on the frontline during the pandemic, had the Prime Minister's phone number, would they get the pay rise that they so obviously deserve?

The Prime Minister: I am proud of what this Government have done to support the NHS throughout the pandemic with record investment of another £92 billion. To help nurses, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, we put in, last year, the bursary of £5,000, plus the £3,000 on top to help with training and the costs of childcare; and in the past couple of years, a 12.8% increase on the starting salary. Above all, we are helping the profession by recruiting more nurses than ever before. There are already 50,000 more people in the NHS this year than there were last year, and 10,600 more nurses. That is what I would say to many of the nurses that I have talked to in the past few days and weeks, and we will continue to back them to the hilt.

Keir Starmer: If the Prime Minister had been talking to the NHS frontline he would know how insulted they are by his pay cut after everything they have put in over the past year. They did not get a text from the Prime Minister; they got a kick in the teeth. Mr Speaker, there is a pattern to this Government: the Prime Minister is fixing tax breaks for his friends; the Chancellor is pushing the Treasury to help Lex Greensill; the Health Secretary is meeting Greensill for drinks; and David Cameron is texting anybody who will reply. Every day, there are new allegations about this Conservative Government: dodgy personal protective equipment deals; tax breaks for their mates; and the Health Secretary owning shares in a company delivering NHS services. Sleaze, sleaze, sleaze, and it is all on his watch. With this scandal now firmly centred on him, how on earth does he expect people to believe that he is the person to clean this mess up?

The Prime Minister: I will tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman why this Government are doing the right thing at the right time. The difference between us and the Labour party is, I am afraid, glaringly obvious. We get on with taking the tough decisions to protect the people of this country and to take our country forward, uniting and levelling up. We take the tough decisions to procure tens of thousands of ventilators in record time, which, apparently, he now opposes. We put forward tougher sentences for rapists and violent criminals, which he then opposes on a three-line Whip. We take tough decisions to stick up for the fans of our national game. While captain hindsight snipes continually from the sidelines, this Government get on with delivering on the people's priorities.

[914529] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Back in 2019, the Government gave the Labour council in Bradford hundreds of thousands of pounds to carry out a feasibility study for the Shipley eastern bypass. It was due to report in autumn 2019, but this was put back to April 2020, yet a year on there is still no sign of it. Will the Prime Minister please intervene to ensure that this vital infrastructure project is delivered? Will he also meet me and our hon. Friend the Member for Keighley

(Robbie Moore) to see how we can progress our campaign to break away our constituencies from Bradford Council and set up a truly local unitary authority to deliver for our constituents?

The Prime Minister: On my hon. Friend's second point, I am sure that the relevant Minister would be happy to meet and consult him. On his point about the Shipley bypass, the matter is currently with Bradford Council. I suggest that that Labour-controlled council follows the example of many Conservative-controlled councils and delivers that essential infrastructure on time, creating jobs and opportunities for his constituents.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) [V]: May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on both the Queen's 95th birthday and the justice that we have now seen in the George Floyd case?

This morning's revelations surrounding the Prime Minister's interference in covid contracts are incredibly serious. Whether it is cash for questions in the '90s or texts for contracts during this pandemic, people know that this is the same old story; this is how the Tories do government. The Prime Minister is at the very heart of this scandal. Will he reveal today how many more covid contracts he personally fixed? If he has nothing to hide, will he publish all personal exchanges on these contracts before the end of the day?

The Prime Minister: Of course, there is absolutely nothing to conceal about this. I am happy to share all the details with the House, as indeed I have shared them with my officials, immediately. It is thanks to that immediate action that we have been able not just to deal with the ventilator challenge, but to help the people of the whole United Kingdom to get access, in record times, to the vaccines on which we all depend. The same goes for rolling out PPE. We have had to work at incredible speed, and I think the people of this country understand that it is sometimes necessary to act decisively to get things done.

Ian Blackford: If the Prime Minister says, "There's nothing to see here"—publish those exchanges. Let us all see them and have that transparency. Frankly, his excuses just do not stack up.

Last March the Prime Minister and the Chancellor had all the time in the world to fix contracts for a cosy club of friends and Tory donors, but did not have any time to support the millions of self-employed. Those 3 million people did not have a David Cameron or a James Dyson to text the Prime Minister for them; they were on their own and they were left behind by this Prime Minister. This Tory texts for contracts scandal is growing more and more serious with every revelation—*[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister was eager to initiate an inquiry into his predecessor, David Cameron—*[Interruption.]* Will he be as quick to commit to a public and comprehensive inquiry into himself and his own Government?

Mr Speaker: Politics, Prime Minister—*[Laughter.]*

The Prime Minister: Well, Mr Speaker—the right hon. Gentleman says we had all the time in the world. In fact, as the House will recall, at the end of March last year the pandemic was taking off very fast and we had

to act very fast, as I think people up and down the country understand. I thought that his dog made a more sensible contribution just now than he did.

[914530] **Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Farmers in Brecon and Radnorshire have worked tirelessly to give us world-class British food throughout the pandemic. In return, the Welsh Labour and Liberal Democrat Government have given them a slap in the face with their nitrate vulnerable zone policy, which will do nothing for water quality and ignores the water companies dumping thousands of tonnes of sewage into our rivers. Does the Prime Minister agree that this demonstrates Welsh Labour's absolute contempt for rural areas such as mine?

The Prime Minister: Yes, my hon. Friend is entirely right, because agriculture is of course devolved in Wales. If people want to send a clear signal and they want change in the way farmers are treated in Wales, then I hope they will vote Conservative in the Welsh Assembly elections in just two weeks' time and vote for a party that actually champions agriculture and believes in it.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP) [V]: Prime Minister, I was proud to put on the uniform of the Crown and to serve with tens of thousands of men and women from our armed forces and our police in protecting the entire community in Northern Ireland from the ravages of terrorism during our troubled past. The Prime Minister gave a commitment in his election manifesto to introduce legislation to protect those men and women from vexatious prosecutions. Will he stand by and honour that commitment?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman very much, first of all, for his service, and I know that the whole House will agree. I want to put on record, by the way, my thanks to the former Minister for Veterans, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), for all that he did to help with improving the lot of veterans across our country. We have protected many veterans with the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill. There is more to be done, as the right hon. Gentleman rightly says, in the case of veterans of the Northern Ireland conflict, and we will be bringing forward further measures in due course.

[914532] **Ian Levy** (Blyth Valley) (Con) [V]: Since 2019 Blyth Valley has benefited from significant investment for levelling up, including the towns fund, the future high streets fund, and the reinstatement of the rail line. We know now that Blyth will be the home of the UK's first gigafactory developed by BritishVolt, further demonstrating the commitment to build back better. Can I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his drive and commitment to helping areas that have been neglected for so long and ask him to assure the House that he will do all that he can to help those areas realise their full potential? I would like to offer him an open invitation to visit this fabulous constituency of Blyth Valley, where I am sure he will receive a very warm welcome.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend very much. It was only lately that he and I stood on the seafront at Blyth and looked out at some of the incredible

wind farms—the harbingers and the prelude to the huge Dogger Bank wind farms that are going to be built in the North sea. I am delighted that a gigafactory for batteries is being established in Blyth Valley. Thanks to his help and his leadership, we are seeing Blyth Valley and many other parts of the north-east at the forefront of the green industrial revolution delivering high-wage and high-skilled jobs across our country.

[914525] **Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): Last week, hundreds of GMB gas engineers were sacked for refusing to sign new contracts expecting them to work harder and get paid less. Fire and rehire abuses by rogue employers are spreading through workplaces like a virus. The Government have called the practice “unacceptable” and “bully-boy tactics” but refuse to take action to ban it. I am giving the Prime Minister the chance to show us all where he stands. Will he commit, here and now, to include proposals to end this shameful and immoral practice of fire and rehire in next month’s Queen’s Speech—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I repeat what I have said about that practice. If the hon. Lady would be kind enough to send me details about the case that she raises, I will be happy to take it up.

[914534] **Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): Access to superfast broadband is critical in today’s society but many people living in Runnymede and Weybridge cannot access it. While this question is essential viewing, my constituents may struggle to watch it streaming at home this evening if someone else is catching up on the “MasterChef” final. Does my right hon. Friend share my ambition that everyone in Runnymede and Weybridge should have access to superfast broadband just as every house should have access to water and electricity?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is why we have massively accelerated the roll-out of superfast broadband and gigabit broadband. Coverage of reliable gigabit broadband was just 9% when this Government took over; it will be 60% by the end of this year. We are driving it up across the whole country, uniting and levelling up and unleashing the potential of the entire UK.

[914526] **Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): Day after day, we see more corruption come to light, yet day after day, I speak to more desperate constituents who are excluded from this Government’s support—people who have lost livelihoods, homes and businesses built up over the years and have been unable to put food on their table. It seems that all they needed was the Prime Minister’s or the Chancellor’s phone number. Frankly, I am ashamed on behalf of this country. Will the Prime Minister and the Chancellor now take the calls of my constituents in Cardiff North and meet me and them to discuss how they can rebuild their lives after losing so much?

The Prime Minister: I am proud of the roll-out of the ventilators—the 30,000 we delivered from scratch—*[Interruption.]* I am proud of it. I am proud of the decisions that we took. I am proud of what we did—criticised by the Labour party—to roll out vaccines at

record speed. I am proud of what we did to support the people of this country throughout the pandemic, with an overall package of £407 billion to support them. We in this country will bounce back all the better and all the stronger because of the strong economy that we ensured this country had going into the crisis, which would have been impossible under a Labour Government. That is what the hon. Lady should tell her constituents.

[914535] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): I was deeply concerned at the weekend following reports in the *Sunday Express* that the statue of the great United States President Ronald Reagan that once stood in Grosvenor Square has been removed and remains out of public sight. I know the Prime Minister will agree with me that President Reagan was a true friend to the United Kingdom who, alongside Margaret Thatcher, ended the cold war and supported Britain during the liberation of the Falkland Islands. Now that our American friends have moved to a new embassy in Wandsworth, does the Prime Minister agree that President Reagan’s statue should be moved to a more prominent location on Parliament Square, so that visitors from home and across the globe can honour this remarkable man?

The Prime Minister: Did you notice, Mr Speaker, how those on the Opposition Benches recoiled at the idea of the recapture of the Falkland Islands? We have just heard the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) say that she was ashamed of her country. It is no wonder that people take that kind of attitude. I think my hon. Friend is entirely right in what he says about President Reagan. He was a very distinguished president. It is not up to me to install a statue for him; I think that is for the Greater London Authority. I think he has to appeal to the current Mayor of London, although let us hope that there is a new one to do justice to the memory of Ronald Reagan.

[914527] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: Polio, a disease that kills and maims children, has been eliminated in all but one region of the world due to the incredible work of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. In 2019, the then UK International Development Secretary, the right hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) pledged £400 million to the programme, as he said to do otherwise would risk a return to thousands of new polio cases every year. Will the Prime Minister now reassure the House that he will honour that commitment?

The Prime Minister: The Global Polio Eradication Initiative has been backed by £1.37 billion of UK aid since 1995. As the hon. Lady rightly says, there are many proud successes of that programme, and polio across the planet, largely thanks to the help of the British taxpayer, has been almost eliminated.

[914536] **Saqib Bhatti** (Meriden) (Con): I am pleased that common sense has prevailed and all six English clubs have now committed to withdraw from the European super league. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are to protect the beautiful game further, football clubs must put fans at the heart of their decision making?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do. One of the most worrying features of the European super league proposals is that they would have taken clubs that take their names from great, famous English towns and cities and turned them just into global brands with no relation to the fans and the communities that gave them life and that give them the most love and support. That was, in my view, totally wrong, to say nothing of the lack of competition. It is entirely right that my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) will do a root-and-branch investigation into the governance of football and what we can do to promote the role of fans in that governance.

[914531] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Prime Minister will be aware that opinion polls continue to show a majority in favour of Scottish independence. Does he agree that one factor is the fact that we have been lumbered with a Prime Minister who thinks that £1 spent in Croydon is of more value to the country than £1 spent in Strathclyde?

The Prime Minister: I think what the people of Scotland need is an Administration in Scotland who spend the taxpayers' money in Scotland better and more wisely, because the results of the Scottish nationalist party are dismal. They are failing on education. They are failing on crime. They are failing on their taxation policies. No wonder all they can talk about is another irresponsible referendum and breaking up this country.

[914537] **Andrew Griffith** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Recycling is one way in which we can all individually tackle the climate crisis. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating West Sussex County Council on recycling 53% of its household waste—almost double the level of neighbouring Brighton and Hove City Council?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend draws attention to a very valuable and important point, which is that across the country, it is Conservative councils that keep council tax low, overwhelmingly, and deliver better services, such as recycling. He is absolutely right to laud the efforts of the Conservative-led council in West Sussex.

[914533] **Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab) [V]: In a recent Conservative party political broadcast, the Home Secretary claimed that only Conservative police and crime commissioners are responsible for increasing police officer numbers, yet Humberside's police and crime commissioner, Keith Hunter, has put well over 500 additional officers on our streets since 2016—the largest proportional increase in the country—and was doing so well before the Government pledged to reverse their own cuts. Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to do the decent thing: correct the record and congratulate Keith Hunter on taking Humberside police from the worst-performing force to one of the best in his time as police and crime commissioner?

The Prime Minister: I do not wish to sound like a stickler for accuracy—[*Laughter*]*—*which is my normal position, Mr Speaker, as you know, but since becoming Humberside's PCC in 2016, the force has recruited 434 officers. Of those, 129 have been recruited as part of the Government's 20,000 drive, and Mr Hunter himself praised the Government's police recruitment strategy, saying that the Government's target had lifted officer numbers in Humberside above 2,000. So I think it would be fair to say that Mr Hunter's efforts, however laudable they may be, would have been impossible without the determination of this Government to recruit more police officers and put them out on the street.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): When my right hon. Friend visited the west midlands earlier this week to meet our brilliant Mayor, Andy Street, was he aware that the Mayor has increased sevenfold the investment in transport, and we now have 108 shiny new carriages for the cross-city line? What advice does he have for my constituents in the royal town of Sutton Coldfield on 6 May?

Mr Speaker: The ball's on the penalty spot—come on, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Andy Street is rolling out not only 50 new stations but 150 miles more track, linking up communities across the west midlands, delivering job opportunities, delivery growth and delivering hope for the west midlands, and that is why I think the people of the west midlands should vote for another term for Mayor Andy Street.

Mr Speaker: Let's bring in the goalkeeper—John Spellar.

[914538] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): I shall decline that invitation, as a west midlands voter.

The Prime Minister said earlier that he would use new freedoms to ensure that we buy British steel. Over the last year, the difficulties with PPE provision and vaccine production have demonstrated clearly the risks of neglecting British production capacity, let alone the impact on the prosperity and levelling-up agendas. So will the Prime Minister now instruct Government Ministers, civil servants and public bodies that when purchasing goods and services they must buy British first?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course—look at what we are achieving. Since the PPE crisis began—since the pandemic began—we have turned things round. We have procured 32 billion items of PPE, and 85% of it can now be made in this country, which was completely impossible before the pandemic. Look at what is happening on vaccines: we have the Valneva factory in Scotland, and we have Novavax in Teesside, which is going to be absolutely indispensable for our future success. Those investments will not only help to protect our country against pandemics for the future but will help us to drive jobs and prosperity for the long term across the whole of the UK.

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: I would like to update the House on some news from the House of Lords. I am informed that Lord McFall of Alcluith has been successfully elected to the position of Lord Speaker. I have known John McFall since I was elected as MP for Chorley in 1997, and you could not find a nicer, kinder and more welcoming politician. Not only was he an extremely hard-working constituency MP, but he played a leading role as Chairman of the Commons Treasury Committee in holding the banking sector to account following the financial crash of 2008-09. For the past five years he has served with distinction as senior Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords, demonstrating a zeal for impartiality and fair-mindedness. I believe that his collaborative style and experience prove that he is exceptionally well qualified to take up the duty of Lord Speaker.

Having worked closely with John on issues such as security, I relish the chance to do so again on matters that cut across both Houses of Parliament. May I send congratulations on behalf of the whole House? I also want to send my best wishes to Lord Fowler, who has been Lord Speaker. I wish Lord Fowler—Norman—well in the next stage of his illustrious career, which we know of well.

Points of Order

12.37 pm

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have constituents at Liberty Steel. I have been trying to make sense of its financial relationship with Greensill Capital. I raised the issue of lobbying with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and asked him about possible contact with the former Prime Minister, David Cameron. I have asked the same of the Governor of the Bank of England. An answer to my named day parliamentary question of 29 March is long overdue. Mr Speaker, would you advise how Ministers should respond in a timely way to reasonable questions asked by Members of the House?

Mr Speaker: First, I thank the hon. Member for giving me notice of his point of order. All hon. Members are entitled to expect a timely response to their parliamentary questions. In this case, those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the point of order, and I am sure that the matter will now be looked into. If the hon. Member does not receive a response to his question he might wish to talk to the Table Office about ways to pursue this matter. I would point out, and quite strongly, that we are talking about people's lives and communities, and I would expect that Ministers take seriously their role and duty to Members of Parliament who have been elected in those constituencies. Whatever their political side, MPs quite rightly deserve answers to their questions. There is no reason for Ministers not to answer in a timely way, so I hope that the message goes across clearly to the Treasury Bench.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During Northern Ireland questions, the Secretary of State accused members of my party of making incendiary remarks on Twitter. He should know by now that words in this Chamber have an implication on the streets—we have seen that too many times. He has been sitting in his ivory tower during all this trouble, when the rest of us were on the street, toe to toe with the men of violence, so will you ask him to come to the House to clarify his remarks, please?

Mr Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair, but I assure the hon. Member that his point is on the record, and it will certainly have been heard.

I am now suspending the House for three minutes to enable the necessary arrangements for the next business to be made.

12.39 pm

Sitting suspended.

Fur Trade (Prohibition)

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

12.44 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the import, export, purchase and sale of fur and fur products; and for connected purposes.

Twenty-two years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) introduced in this House a Bill to ban fur farming. She said it was time to

“put an end to a cruel barbaric practice”

of

“keeping wild animals in small barren cages simply to obtain an unessential luxury product.”—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1999; Vol. 326, c. 1339.]

Her Bill was taken up by the Labour Government and a year later became law, making Britain the first country in the world to ban the cruelty of fur farming, but despite that decision the products of that same cruelty have continued for the past 20 years to be imported into our country from overseas and put on sale in our shops. That double standard has continued simply because as a member of the EU, decisions on what imports to permit were not ours to take. Now, however, as an independent trading nation, we have the opportunity to eliminate that double standard and once again to make history by becoming the first country in the world to ban the importation and sale of fur.

In doing so, we will have the overwhelming support of the animal-loving British public. The most recent YouGov poll commissioned by the Humane Society International UK shows that 72% of the British public support a complete ban, and currently only 3% of people wear animal fur. Yesterday, in a further sign of public feeling, the Fur Free Britain campaign delivered to Downing Street its petition with more than 1 million signatures in support. I thank all the organisations and individuals behind the Fur Free Britain campaign, led by the Humane Society International UK, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, PETA UK, Open Cages and Four Paws, as well as their official campaign partner, the *Daily Mirror*, for all their tireless work on this issue over the years and for the concern and compassion they have inspired in so many, including myself.

The Bill I am presenting today, is a response to that public pressure, but let me explain why it is necessary, what it seeks to do and, just as important, what it does not. At present, fur taken from farmed animals gassed or electrocuted after spending their short lives in cramped cages can be imported into the UK from countries all around the world. In addition, fur taken from wild animals after their slow, agonising deaths captured in leg-hold traps and other inhumane devices can be imported from the EU and a select group of other countries. Last year, the value of those imports was £29 million. The majority of the imported fur is turned into clothing, hats and accessories by the fashion industry here Britain, either to be sold in our shops or exported overseas in an export trade that was worth £20 million last year. Under the Bill, everything I have just described would be

banned in the UK: the import and export of fur and fur products and the sale of new fur products in our shops.

Some people will argue that we should not criminalise the wearing of existing fur products in the UK, or their sale in the second-hand market. I entirely agree. The ultimate purpose of the Bill is to ensure that animals in other countries are not bred, trapped or killed today to supply the UK trade in fur. It does nothing to serve that purpose to criminalise the wearing or sale of products made many years ago. Others will argue that there should be an exemption for fur hats and other items traditionally worn for religious reasons, such as the Jewish shtreimel. Again, I agree. A reasonable ban on the trade will be able to distinguish between fur worn as a mark of faith and fur worn as a fashion accessory.

Finally, some will argue that any ban will have consequences for jobs and businesses in the fashion industry—a point made for many years by the British Fur Trade Association. I agree that, just as there was with the ban on fur production two decades ago, there must be support and compensation for any business and workers affected—but we should not exaggerate the economic effects. After all, in 2020, the UK imported £20 billion worth of clothing items, but imports of fur and fur articles made up just 0.15% of that total. Nor should we let the economic effects distract us from the core principles at stake. It was the former head of the British Fur Trade Association, Mr Mike Moser, who left the organisation last year saying that it was an “indefensible” industry and that

“there is no justification for fur”.

If there are some arguments that my Bill seeks to accommodate, there are others that I feel it cannot. Some critics will say that the Queen’s Guard must be allowed to continue wearing bearskin hats as part of its ceremonial dress. As we wish Her Majesty a happy birthday in this very sad week, my view is that if she decided to stop purchasing new fur some 18 months ago, it is high time for her guards to do the same and transition to synthetic alternatives. After all, it was the Prime Minister himself who said in 2015:

“If Stella McCartney can help save a few bears by making false busbys then...I’m not going to fight that.”

Other critics may argue that this is a civil liberties issue and people should be free to buy and sell whatever they please. My view is that the British public feel deeply that the trade in animal fur is something that we do not wish to continue in our country, and that overwhelming opinion cannot be permanently blocked by the very small minority who disagree.

Finally, some critics may argue that a ban on fur might cause us problems when seeking to negotiate new trade deals with fur-producing nations such as the United States and Canada. My view is that that is, in fact, an argument for pressing ahead with a UK ban at the earliest opportunity, before it can become a bargaining chip in any negotiation or, even worse, we find ourselves bound by the terms of any trade agreement that makes a fur ban more difficult to introduce. After all, it would be bizarre if we finally regained the right to take this decision as an independent trading nation but then found ourselves unable to do so because of a new trade deal signed elsewhere.

That brings me to the question of timing. I hope that the Government will take up my Bill, but if they intend to do so, I hope that they will do so quickly, decisively and as a stand-alone issue, because the time to act is now. We cannot wait and run the risk that a proposed fur ban gets either bogged down or watered down as a result of future trade negotiations. We cannot wait for a fur ban to be included in some much wider animal welfare Bill that risks suffering months or years of delay. And from the point of view of morality, we should not wait while yet more animals overseas live short, miserable lives in wire cages, or suffer cruel, slow deaths in leg-hold traps, just to service a fur trade in our country that the vast majority of our people oppose.

Let me conclude by echoing the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood in 1999, when she introduced her Bill to ban the domestic production of fur. She said:

“As we approach the new millennium, it is up to the House to set the standards that we want for the next one”.—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1999; Vol. 326, c. 1339.]

As we enter another new era as an independent trading nation, it is once again up to this House to set the standards we want by deciding what trade we wish to permit. I therefore urge colleagues across the House to join me in saying that Britain no longer wishes to permit this barbaric trade in the fur of animals, and instead chooses to make history by being the first country in the world to ban that trade in full. That is what my Bill seeks to do, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Taiwo Owatemi, Emily Thornberry, Luke Pollard, Clive Lewis, Kerry McCarthy, Maria Eagle, Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Alex Sobel, Edward Miliband, Rachel Hopkins, Caroline Lucas and Seema Malhotra present the Bill.

Taiwo Owatemi accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 289).

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

12.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): I beg to move,

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 19 April, be approved.

This Government are committed to taking all necessary steps to protect the people of this country. Tackling terrorism in all its guises is a key element of that mission. The threat level in the UK, which is set by the independent joint terrorism analysis centre, remains at substantial. That means that a terrorist attack in our country is likely.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Can the Minister give the figures for how many terrorist attacks have been thwarted by our security services? I realise that he may not be able to do so.

Chris Philp: I can confirm to my right hon. Friend that our security services and our counter-terrorism police work tirelessly to foil terror plots. In fact, in the past four years since 2017, 28 such terror plots have been successfully thwarted. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our security services, our counter-terrorism police and all those who work in the law enforcement and intelligence community for the work they do, often at risk to themselves, to keep us, our constituents and our fellow citizens safe on a daily basis.

The constantly evolving nature of terrorism means that we continuously have to consider whether new action is necessary to ensure that our response is adapted to the threat picture. The danger posed by terrorist organisations varies from one group to another. There are those that recruit, radicalise, promote and encourage terrorism, as well as those that prepare and commit terrible acts of violence against innocent members of the public. We have a duty to tackle all those groups. While we can never entirely eliminate the threat from terrorism, we can minimise the danger that it poses and keep the public safe.

In that spirit, 76 international terrorist organisations are currently proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000. Thanks to the dedication, courage and skill of our counter-terrorism police and our security and intelligence services, most of those groups have never carried out a successful attack on UK soil. Proscription is a powerful tool for degrading terrorist organisations, and I will explain the impact that it can have shortly. The group that we now propose to add to the list of terrorist organisations, by amending schedule 2 of the Terrorism Act 2000, is the Atomwaffen Division, or AWD, and its alias, the National Socialist Order, or NSO. The AWD is a predominantly US-based white supremacist group that was active under that guise between 2015 and 2020. The NSO is the alias of the AWD, and it has claimed to be the AWD's successor group. It remains active to this day. The group's actions, which seek to divide communities, stir up hatred and incite terrorism, are entirely contrary to the interests of our nation.

Under section 3 of the Terrorism Act 2000, the Home Secretary has the power to proscribe an organisation if she believes that it is currently concerned in terrorism. If the statutory test is met, the Home Secretary may then

[Chris Philp]

exercise her discretion to proscribe that organisation. The Home Secretary considers a number of factors in considering whether to exercise that discretion, including the nature and scale of the organisation's activities and the need to support other members of the international community in tackling terrorism.

The effect of proscription is to outlaw a listed organisation and ensure that it is unable to operate in the United Kingdom. It is a criminal offence for a person to belong to, support or arrange a meeting in support of a proscribed organisation. It is a criminal offence to wear clothing or carry articles in public that arouse reasonable suspicion that an individual is a member of that organisation. The penalties for proscription offences can be up to 10 years in prison or an unlimited fine, and the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill, which I believe is due to receive Royal Assent next week, includes provisions to increase the penalty for certain proscription offences to 14 years.

Proscription is designed to crack down on a group's ability to operate, through various means including enabling prosecution, supporting the takedown of online material, underpinning immigration-related disruptions—for example, excluding members of the group from United Kingdom—and making it possible to seize cash. Given the wide-ranging impact of this power, the Home Secretary exercises it only after thoroughly reviewing the available evidence on any organisation, whether that is open-source material, intelligence material or advice that reflects consultation across Government, the intelligence agencies, law enforcement and international partners. Decisions are taken with great care and consideration, and it is appropriate that such orders must be approved by both Houses of Parliament.

Having carefully considered the evidence, the Home Secretary believes that the AWD, including through the activities of its alias, the NSO, is concerned in terrorism and that the discretionary factors weigh in favour of proscription. Although I am unable to comment on specific intelligence, I can provide the House with a summary of the group's activities. It celebrates a collection of noxious essays that advocate the use of violence to bring about a fascist, white ethno-state by initiating the collapse of modern society via an ideology known as accelerationism. AWD's online propaganda has encouraged and promoted terrorist acts, and this content remains influential among accelerationist terrorist groups.

We know that AWD has inspired, at least in part, several loosely affiliated franchise groups abroad, including Feuerkrieg Division, which was proscribed in July last year. In March 2020, AWD claimed that it had disbanded, following pressure from US law enforcement agencies, but in July 2020, NSO announced itself online as AWD's successor, adhering to the same abhorrent ideology. We therefore believe that NSO should be covered as an alias organisation of AWD. Our strategy to combat terrorism looks at the full spectrum of activity. It is absolutely right that this includes confronting square on the threats from groups who call for violence and mass murder and who unlawfully glorify horrific terrorist acts so that they are prevented from continuing to stir up hatred and incite or carry out terrorism.

When groups without a physical presence in the UK are proscribed, particularly when looking at groups such as AWD, which have an established online presence, it is important to consider the impact that proscription has. By proscribing supremacist, accelerationist terrorist groups such as these, we underline our commitment to ensuring that the UK is a hostile environment for individuals involved in terrorist activity. Our objective is to ensure that there are no safe spaces for any of these terrorist groups or their ideologies, in which they are able to promote or share their extreme views. We are committed to preventing that from happening, so in proscribing AWD and NSO, we send a clear signal that dissemination of the group's online propaganda is unacceptable.

The Home Office continues to work closely with law enforcement, our international partners and tech companies, including through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, to collaboratively tackle the spread of terrorism content online. We know that the proscription of groups helps tech companies to better tackle terrorist materials on their platforms. We believe that there is a strong case for the Government to proscribe AWD and to list NSO as an alias. It will build on the robust action that the Government have already been taking by proscribing National Action and its aliases, Sonnenkrieg Division and Feuerkrieg Division.

Our message is clear: we will always take every possible action to counter the threat from those who hate the values we cherish. The safety and security of the public is our No. 1 priority and I therefore commend this order to the House.

1.2 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): This Labour Opposition have made it clear repeatedly that our first, overriding priority is, and always will be, to protect the British public and keep our communities safe. This includes from those who cynically and dangerously attack our values, customs and way of life through the provocation and perpetration of horrendous acts of terror. It is right that this foul group be outlawed as a terrorist organisation, so we welcome and support this proscription motion, which sends a strong message that racism, fascism and the glorification of terrorism simply will not be tolerated in our society or on our streets. We also welcome the clarity and direction that this measure will provide to counter-terrorism policing and the intelligence and security services, as well as their operational partners in respect of this organisation and its members.

As has been touched on, Atomwaffen Division, or AWD, is a white supremacist group, predominantly US-based, and it was active between the years 2015 and 2020. Disturbingly, AWD believes in an ideology that has come to be known as accelerationism. This group follows a collection of writings that advocate violence to bring about a white ethno-state by instigating the collapse of society through a race war. It is reported that AWD's techniques include the harassment of public figures, such as politicians, journalists and others, and organising terror plots.

AWD's vile propaganda in the online sphere has promoted and sparked terrorist activity. The content very likely remains influential among accelerationist terrorist groups. It is said that AWD inspired affiliated

franchise groups abroad including Feuerkrieg Division—the last terrorist group to be proscribed. In March 2020, AWD claimed it had disbanded. The National Socialist Order announced itself as AWD's successor in July 2020, following the same aims and ideology. It is believed that AWD is almost certainly operating under the NSO alias. Shockingly, under the guise of the NSO, the group has dedicated itself to bringing about white power government by “any means necessary”; this is seen to be an open endorsement of violence.

We know that the threat from far-right extremism and terrorism here in the UK and abroad is rising. Home Office figures show that the number of far-right prisoners in custody for terrorism-related offences has grown steadily for the last seven years. In the year ending December 2020, there were 42 persons holding far-right ideologies in custody for terror offences—the highest number on record, and accounting for a fifth of those in custody for terrorism-related offences. To put that into perspective, only five years previously in the year ending 2015, there were five persons with far-right ideologies in custody for terrorism-related offences, accounting for just 3% of those in custody for terror offences.

The latest Home Office figures for Prevent and Channel show that 43% of the 697 Channel cases in the year ending March 2019 were initially referred due to concerns about right-wing radicalisation—the most common reason by more than 90 cases. Some 22% of Prevent referrals more widely were referred due to right-wing radicalisation concerns.

It is profoundly concerning that AWD seems to have been operational since 2015 and to have expanded in March 2020, yet it is only now that decisive action is being taken. We raised similar concerns on the adequacy of timing back in July 2020, during the proscription of the white supremacist group Feuerkrieg Division. Why on earth has it taken so long for the Government to recognise this threat and finally proscribe this group? It is already way past its peak and action has already been taken against it in the USA. The slowness of the UK's response begs the question: is the proscription process really fit for purpose? We have previously raised the need for action to be taken against organisations such as the Nazi occultist group, Order of Nine Angles, which has influenced Atomwaffen Division and still seems able to operate freely in the UK.

Counter-terrorism police leaders have long warned about the growing threat from far-right terrorism both here in the UK and abroad. I ask the Minister whether counter-terrorism policing has been granted all the funding and additional resources it has requested to tackle the operations of Atomwaffen Division and National Socialist Order, and shut down their existing networks. Can he tell me whether enforcement orders are being tracked and enforced?

We need to know what steps the Government are taking to ensure that proscription measures have the maximum possible impact, including preventing the group's illicit operation in new formats in both the online and offline arenas. Proscription should be at the start of the enforcement process, not the end. Will the Minister tell me whether a ban has been imposed on the association of Atomwaffen Division to prevent the group from setting up as a new organisation again?

Today demonstrates yet more conclusive evidence of the Home Secretary's lack of a robust, coherent strategy to deal with the growing menace of far-right terrorism. Labour has long warned the Government about this, but where is the action? How can the Home Secretary seriously claim that she is doing everything in her reach to address the threat without such a strategy, and how many times do the Opposition have to raise this matter? I trust that the Minister will recognise the gravity and urgency of these questions in the context of today's motion and in terms of protecting the public, and I hope he can provide suitably adequate assurances to the House.

I wish to put on record our thanks to HOPE not hate for its hard work and dedication in monitoring the activities of far-right extremist organisations.

Our priority is to keep the public and our communities safe. Today's proscription order is welcome in relation to that most important of goals, but we are seeing an emerging pattern from this Government—one of dither and delay on these vital decisions, with action happening far too late. Ministers must prove that they have a robust enough strategy to address this worrying rise in far-right extremism and terrorism, and tackle this appalling threat.

1.9 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: I too thank the Minister for setting out the reasons behind the tabling of this order. Of course, we fully support the proscription of Atomwaffen Division and its National Socialist Order alias. There is little more I can add to what has already been said about why that is the right thing to do. AWD is a neo-Nazi white supremacist group which rails against Jews, LGBT people and other minorities. It promotes and celebrates violence and terrorism. It has made efforts, as I understand it, to recruit from the US military. The proscription of this horrendous organisation is therefore absolutely appropriate. That is particularly so against a backdrop of right-wing extremism that is a growing problem in the US, at home and elsewhere, an extremism that is increasingly vicious and increasingly attracted to violence.

There are four issues I want to raise with the Minister as constructively as possible. The first, echoing what the shadow Minister the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) said, is about timing—why now? The explanatory memorandum sets out that AWD has inspired, at least in part, several loosely affiliated franchise groups abroad, including Feuerkrieg Division which was proscribed here in July 2020—the Minister repeated that himself. Similarly, it is just over a year since we debated in support of the proscription of Sonnenkrieg Division—SKD. Some describe SKD as the UK arm of Atomwaffen Division. We know that in December 2018 three members of SDK were arrested for threatening to kill Prince Harry and that the leaders had been in direct contact with senior AWD members. All that prompts the question why did we not proscribe AWD at those earlier points in time when we knew of those associations? The explanatory memorandum itself suggests that AWD has already passed the peak of its powers. Why could this not have happened earlier? As the shadow Minister said, timing is an issue that has been raised before and similar complaints are regularly

[Stuart C. McDonald]

made at debates of this type. Last year, when SKD and System Resistance Network were proscribed, that happened only after the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) in particular had for many months been calling for such action in the Home Affairs Committee and in the Chamber. I think we will hear from him shortly. If we are to maximise the disruptive potential of the orders, is there not more potential to act speedily?

On a related note, again echoing what the shadow Minister said, we know there have been calls from HOPE not hate and others for the Order of Nine Angles to also be proscribed, adding that it has been a key influence on AWD and several other Nazi terror groups, and implicated in planned terror attacks in the USA. Is there not a danger that the Government are repeating their slow step-by-step approach and thereby again limiting the ability of these orders to cause disruption?

Secondly, I want to ask the Minister about what international discussions there have been with allies about this specific group and the more general approach to proscription. It was noticeable that when reporting on the recent Australian decision to proscribe SKD, *The Sydney Morning Herald* quoted an Australian security intelligence organisation official in saying that other extremist groups had been suggested for prohibition by the UK. However, it was decided that they did not meet the legal definition and that the UK's definition for proscribing a terrorist organisation was broader than Australia's. I appreciate that the Minister will be limited about what he can say with regard to those discussions, but does that not highlight the need for better co-ordinated international action to tackle the specific and unique threat posed by far-right terror groups? We know—I think I have already mentioned this—that the international connections among white supremacist groups are complicated, but there are, apparently, all sorts of close relationships, with members drawing inspiration from each other.

Thirdly, what recent assessment has the Minister made of how effective proscription is proving to be and will continue to be? I think he used the word “powerful” to describe it as a powerful tool. We know it does lead to disruption and the arrest of members, but equally the fact that we are continually adding aliases, while I appreciate that that is absolutely and appropriate, raises the question of whether we are really causing anything more than inconvenience to these actors. I just ask simply: what can be done to maximise the potential impact of the orders?

Fourthly and finally, can we look again at precisely how we scrutinise these orders? I appreciate there are good reasons why the Government do not want to give significant advanced notice to the groups they are planning to proscribe, hence this instrument was laid only two days ago, and nor, of course, can the Government publish the information that the proscription review group has about these organisations, but that does tend to mean, as former independent terrorism legislation reviewer David Anderson said, that these debates can be perfunctory. These are significant powers. While this is a clearcut case, others will not be so clearcut. So how can we strengthen the scrutiny process? Is there possibly

a role for the Intelligence and Security Committee in scrutinising these decisions? What more can we do to improve oversight?

In conclusion, in due course we should perhaps have a broader debate on the use and operation of these powers, but for today we of course fully support the proscription of this horrendous organisation and pay tribute to all who work hard to tackle and contain such groups, and to keep us safe.

1.14 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I welcome the banning of the AWD. It is a dangerous Nazi group and any Government action against such groups is welcome. Far-right terrorism is on the rise and is currently the fastest-growing terror threat in the country. Although I of course welcome proscription, the banning of an organisation must be the start of the enforcement process, not the end.

As parliamentary chair of HOPE not hate, an anti-fascist campaign group, I have spoken previously in the Chamber about the threat of the far right, particularly with regard to the Order of Nine Angles. HOPE not hate has consistently provided a clear case for the proscription of the O9A. It is not a new organisation—it has been active since the 1970s—and its members make use of largely unmonitored, encrypted social media platforms to incite hatred and inspire people to commit acts of terror.

Over the past 24 months alone, eight Nazis who have been linked to the O9A have been convicted for terror offences in the UK, with the majority of them in their teens. Strong evidence suggests that children as young as 13 are being groomed by the group. It is believed that the O9A's core membership is around 2,300 people, with a further 2,000 sympathisers worldwide. This is no fringe group; it is a very serious organisation and is quickly becoming one of the most extreme far-right terror groups in the UK.

In July last year, a US soldier was charged with giving the O9A classified information on his unit's deployment, with the intent of the group attacking the unit. A second soldier has posted pictures of himself brandishing O9A literature, alongside the caption “Hidden in plain sight”. Such groups make use of encrypted social media platforms and dark online spaces, so it is extremely difficult to track their movement and activity.

It is more than a year since I co-ordinated a letter from a cross-party group of MPs calling for the O9A to be banned, and I also met the Minister for Security, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire). I am therefore disappointed that, despite vocal pressure and constructive discussion from me and other colleagues, and compelling evidence from HOPE not hate, the Government have missed an opportunity and are still unwilling to act and proscribe the group. Will the Minister tell the House why that is?

It is becoming clear that the Government need to conduct a review of the proscription process. Ministers have previously told me that they cannot give a running commentary on the workings in this policy area, but will they answer the following question themselves? Does the proscription review process have sufficient resources to ensure that it is able to move briskly enough? Are Ministers seriously satisfied that it has taken this long to ban the AWD? Given that the far

right poses the fastest-growing terror threat, are Ministers satisfied that intelligence gathering is sufficiently strong to proactively consider groups that engage in activities close to the threshold for proscription? Are Ministers happy with the level of enforcement against proscribed organisations and their members?

In the past, proscription was the culmination of the process against a group, whereas it should merely be the start. I again urge the Government to review the process in full and seriously to consider the proscription of other groups—such as the Order of Nine Angles—that have a clear and consistent record of spreading hate and conspiring to commit acts of terror.

1.17 pm

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): I am sure that all of us in this House are united in opposing violent, fascist and anti-democratic terrorist activity. We will all agree on proscribing the Atomwaffen Division, which calls for white supremacy and race war, but it is clear that the measure before us was not introduced soon enough and does not go far enough.

Fascist political activity online now has global reach, and Nazis in one country inspire and encourage those elsewhere, while seeking to twist political debate to their race-obsessed ideologies, particularly on social media. Sites such as Parler, 8chan and BitChute are a hotbed of extremist content, and more mainstream social media sites, including Twitter, Facebook and Reddit, both host such content and point users towards the more niche parts of the internet where terrorist activity is glorified and copycat activity encouraged.

Governments must take this issue more seriously and be more adept at responding to the threats posed by these groups. The Atomwaffen Division formed in 2015 and claims to have disbanded back in March 2020, to be replaced by its successor, the National Socialist Order. Will the Minister set out what will be done to speed up future proscriptions?

This is a missed opportunity. I commend HOPE not hate as the leading and tireless campaigners against fascism in this country. HOPE not hate was instrumental in intervening in a murder plot against one of my hon. Friends. The organisation is clear that this was a chance also to ban the Order of Nine Angles, a Nazi occult group that promotes terrorism, murder, sexual violence and child abuse. HOPE not hate recommended that it be proscribed in March 2020—over a year ago—yet there has still been no action to ban it and to give the police the specific instruction to disband it. Over the past two years, eight Nazis linked to the Order of Nine Angles have been convicted of terror offences in the UK. Between 2015 and 2020, the number of people holding far-right ideologies in custody in the UK for terror offences increased fivefold. These are dangerous, vile networks, and the Government should be taking a proactive lead to quash them.

Our political debate is vulnerable to these extremist groups pushing their racist poison, which can then seep through into the mainstream, as when a Warrington Conservative council candidate tweeted at me, as a Jewish woman, to

“Keep the Aryan race going”

about the Prime Minister’s baby. For the safety of all of us, the Government should be faster and tougher in banning these Nazi groups, particularly with the danger

of vulnerable children and young people being recruited online and given the delays in bringing forward robust online harms legislation to protect them from such a threat.

I commend the Community Security Trust for its work in monitoring threats from far-right organisations, such as those under discussion today, to the Jewish community, including Jewish MPs like myself. It has been an incredible support since I was first elected, and I do not think I could have made it through this year without it. The Jewish community should not need to have guards outside our schools and places of worship, but we know from events in the UK, US and Europe that, as long as these Nazi organisations are free to recruit others, we still need those guards.

More robust action against far-right organisations that we know pose a threat—not only to public figures, but to the wider community and to the very fabric of multiculturalism in Britain—will ensure that the police and other organisations that tackle violent extremism in the UK are better equipped to deal with that threat. I hope that the Home Secretary will bring forward measures on the so-called Order of Nine Angles and other Nazi organisations not covered by existing proscriptions.

1.21 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols). I wholeheartedly endorse her comments, because I also believe that fascism is a threat to everyone in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as indeed are others.

I thank the Minister for his speech and for the hard work he has done up until now and will do in the future, and also our Government for all they do to protect us. I also wish to put on record my sincere thanks to the police, MI5 and others that ensure we can continue to have such democratic opportunities in this society. Everyone who makes that happen and helps that happen deserves our sincere thanks.

Coming as I do from Northern Ireland, I am very aware of the attack in Dungiven on the policewoman and her child as they went to get into a car. I wish to put on record my condemnation of the attack—that deed was targeted in Dungiven in Londonderry—and I think every one of us today realises just how important it is to record our condemnation.

As someone who has lived in Northern Ireland all my life—through some 30-odd years of a terrorism campaign and having served in the Ulster Defence Regiment in that role—I am very aware that many good friends have given their lives in uniform, in the Army and the police, over the years. I always want to put that on record, and I thank them personally in this House today. We have been able to sleep in our beds because of their efforts.

In Northern Ireland, we have seen the devastating impact of the use of abuse for political activism, turning it into political terrorism, and I am always mindful, as my mum would have said, of nipping that problem in the bud. I hope that the Minister is sincerely and honestly trying to nip it in the bud.

Following the murders carried out in the US, the Minister has laid out the impact in his speech to the House, indicating that youths arrested for terror offences have such links. Outlawing the group called Atomwaffen

[Jim Shannon]

Division carries my full support and that of my party, the Democratic Unionist party. I understand that the group has been linked to National Action and, as the Minister said, it is also known as the National Socialist Order. It does and could create a potential threat for every one of us in this House and our constituents outside it. Will the Minister confirm that this action will also address the offshoots—any youth programmes and so on affiliated with the group?

What steps can be taken to help those young people who have been radicalised? Radicalisation in our society is a scourge, whatever side it comes from. Whether it comes from the left or the right, it destroys lives and young people. We must take action to address that ill. Will this order apply to Northern Ireland? There is some indication that National Action has been trying to organise there, and I have concerns about that. There is also evidence that AWD has been trying to gain access to and increase its influence in parts of Northern Ireland.

I congratulate the Minister and the Government on this positive concrete action that will extend to all groups that threaten the stability of the Government and society. Groups that attack people purely because of their ethnicity or religious background must be taken out of society. The Government have responded to this issue in a positive way, and I think all hon. Members will welcome what they have done, and look forward to such positive action in other cases as they arise.

1.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): I thank Members from across the House for the constructive tone they have taken in contributing to this debate. I will pick up on one or two of the points raised before concluding and making way for the Government's newest Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), who I see is preparing to make his well-deserved debut on the Front Bench.

The shadow Minister asked about the speed at which this process unfolds, and various other Members, including the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), asked about other groups that might be under consideration. Given how significant these powers are, and given that someone who is a member of a proscribed organisation or conducts activities in association with it is liable for a prison sentence of up to 10 years—soon to be increased to 14 years—it is right that such matters are considered in a thoughtful and careful way, and not in haste. I assure the shadow Minister, and other Members, that where organisations are suspected of being involved in terrorist activities of this nature, the Government, the Home Office and the intelligence community will move as quickly as they can. I will certainly pass on the remarks I have heard from various Members this afternoon to my colleague the Minister for Security, to ensure that those points are raised.

The shadow Minister asked about resources for counter-terrorism policing, and I am pleased to remind the House that last year there was a £90 million—10%—increase in the resources made available for that, increasing expenditure to £900 million a year. Counter-terrorism policing is categorically getting the funding it needs to keep us safe.

Jim Shannon: Can the Minister confirm that some of those moneys are being allocated to Northern Ireland where terrorism is a real threat?

Chris Philp: I confirm to the hon. Gentleman that Northern Ireland gets its fair share of counter-terrorism police funding. As we know, that issue has been so serious and so acute over many years.

The shadow Minister asked about ensuring we take action against groups that appear in new formats, or groups that discard their old name and organisation but start up as the same organisation in substance, but in a different guise. That is why the concept of aliases is so important. Indeed, we are using that concept today as we formally recognise NSO as effectively an alias of AWD. That is the mechanism by which we ensure that groups cannot just cast off one identity and assume another.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) asked about international discussions. I obviously will not comment on the detail of those, because they touch on security and intelligence issues, but I can confirm that we are in very frequent and close discussion with international partners—particularly Five Eyes countries, but much more widely than that as well—to make sure that we are co-operating and exchanging information on these terrorist groups, to protect our citizens and other citizens from the serious threat that they pose.

The hon. Member asked about follow-up. I agree that proscription is just the beginning, not the end, of the process. The intelligence community and counter-terrorism police continue to monitor and follow up on these organisations. It is for that reason that, since 2001, 49 convictions have been secured in connection with proscription offences—an organisation has been proscribed, and a conviction has later been secured in connection with that.

The hon. Member also asked how these decisions can be scrutinised. There is an appeal process. If an organisation is the subject of a proscription order, it is able at any time—immediately or later—to exercise the right of appeal to a body called the Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission, which is judicial. An organisation can put its case to the judges there. Evidence can be heard in secret, if necessary, and that appellate body can either overturn the Home Secretary's decision or refer a matter back to the Home Secretary. So there is an independent body to which appeals can be made.

Finally, the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) asked about the damage that can be done by hateful ideologies being spread online. The Government published their response to the White Paper on online harms last December and have confirmed their intention this calendar year to bring forward new measures to combat online harms, which will include precisely the dangers that she referred to.

In conclusion, as we have clearly established during the debate, AWD and its alias organisation, NSO, are dangerous organisations. They promote and advocate terrorism. They pose a threat to citizens in not just this country but many countries around the world, including the United States. As such, I urge colleagues across the House to support the order.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 19 April, be approved.

OVERSEAS OPERATIONS (SERVICE PERSONNEL AND VETERANS) BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 23 September 2020 (Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill (Programme)):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(1) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

(2) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(3) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*David Rutley.*)

Question agreed to.

Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Mr Speaker: Before we start, I welcome the new Minister to his place, and I would like to wish the previous Minister all the best. Whatever side we sit on, I think everybody has great respect for Johnny Mercer.

Clause 6

“RELEVANT OFFENCE”

1.33 pm

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government amendments (a) to (o) in lieu.

Lords amendment 2, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 3, and Government consequential amendment (a).

Lords amendment 4, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 5, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendments 6 to 8.

Leo Docherty: Before moving to the main meat of my speech, I wish to formally put on record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for his fantastic work on veterans' issues for many years and his work in getting the Bill to this point. I know that he will share my satisfaction that, with a following wind, it will make further progress today.

Importantly, although it is not in the scope of the debate, I would like to confirm to the House that a Bill will soon come forward from the Northern Ireland Office that will protect our Northern Ireland veterans of Operation Banner and address the legacy of the troubles. I know that this will be of sincere interest to many Members here today.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank the brand-new Minister for allowing me to intervene. That is very good news indeed, and I look forward to it. If that does not happen, we have second-class veteran soldiers, because those who have served abroad are first-class in the way they are treated, and those of us who served many times in Northern Ireland would be second-class.

Leo Docherty: I thank my right hon. and gallant Friend for that intervention. I acknowledge his significant service on operations in Northern Ireland, and I know that he will share my keen expectation that we will, through legislation, in due course, deliver the protection that our Op Banner veterans so richly deserve.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the Minister on coming into his post and very much look forward to working with him, as I did with his predecessor. I wish him well. Obviously, we owe a great debt to those

[*Jim Shannon*]

who have served in Northern Ireland, including the right hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I reiterate that we in the Democratic Unionist party and Unionist people as well want to put on record our thanks to all those who served and made a contribution. We very much look forward to that legislation coming through, which we feel is only correct and right for everyone.

Leo Docherty: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention and I agree entirely with him. Those who have served are the finest among us, and this Government are resolutely committed to delivering through legislation the protections that our veterans of the troubles of Northern Ireland deserve.

I turn to the Government amendments in lieu of Lords amendment 1. The Lords amendment adds a new subsection to clause 6 that has the effect of excluding genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and torture offences from the measures in part 1 of the Bill. In proposing the Government amendment to include genocide, crimes against humanity and torture in schedule 1, I repeat what has been said many times during the passage of the Bill: the decision to exclude only sexual offences from the measures in part 1 did not mean that the Government would not continue to take the international obligations in respect of other offences extremely seriously. I should like to reassure hon. Members once more on that point. The United Kingdom does not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture for any purpose, and we remain committed to maintaining our leading role in the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. However, the Government have listened to the very real concerns expressed by many in both Houses. I would like to express my thanks to Lord Robertson of Port Ellen for his constructive and collegiate approach on this issue.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on his appointment. I very much welcome the concession he has just announced, but why are the Government retaining the presumption against prosecution in the case of war crimes, because that leaves open the risk of UK troops in future being summoned to the International Criminal Court? Surely nobody wants that.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I think he will derive reassurance from the remarks that I am shortly about to make, so I ask him to bear with me.

These concerns are that, by not excluding other serious offences, the Bill risks damaging not only the UK's reputation for upholding international humanitarian and human rights law, including the UN convention against torture, but the reputation of our armed forces. Although we can be absolutely reassured that our armed forces would never resort to acts of genocide or crimes against humanity, and that it would be extremely unlikely for individual members of the services to be charged with such offences, not explicitly excluding these offences from the Bill is clearly an omission that must be rectified, and I am therefore happy to propose that now.

In addition, in order to prevent any further perceived damage to the UK's reputation in respect of our ongoing commitment to uphold the rule of law and our international

obligations, particularly the UN convention against torture, the amendment would add torture offences to the list of excluded offences in schedule 1. The intent of the Bill as drafted is to ensure that the part 1 measures will apply to as wide a range of offences as possible in order to provide reassurance to our service personnel that the operational context will be taken into account in relation to allegations of criminal offences on historical overseas operations. Excluding further offences beyond those of genocide, crimes against humanity, torture and sexual offences would, however, undermine that reassurance by excluding a considerable list of offences from the application of the measures in part 1. We believe that we can take this approach safe in the knowledge that the prosecutor retains their discretion to make the appropriate decision about whether to prosecute a service person on a case-by-case basis, including in respect of other serious offences. The presumption, therefore, against prosecution is a high threshold; it is not a bar.

In proposing this amendment, which will see the exclusion of a greater number of offences from the measures in part 1, the Government believe that it is appropriate to also propose the removal of the delegated power in clause 6, which allows the Secretary of State to amend schedule 1.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): May I also welcome my hon. Friend to the Front Bench? It is an overdue promotion.

May I bring him back to this question of war crimes? He will talk about the Henry VIII clause in a minute, but I want to bring him back to this question. Many of us who are emotionally very supportive of the Bill and, indeed, its successor in respect to Northern Ireland do not want to see, under any circumstances, British soldiers brought before the International Criminal Court. That would be a shame on them and a shame on our country. The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor has made it plain that, in the event that we hinder—and this would be a hindrance—the prosecution of war crimes, they would see it as appropriate for them to bring the prosecution. Much of this is a fantastic improvement, but that seems to me a fairly sizeable hole in the improvement.

Leo Docherty: I take my right hon. Friend's point, but the point to bear in mind is that nothing in the Bill will hinder a prosecution of that sort. What we must bear in mind is that the prosecutor retains the absolute discretion to prosecute if there is a serious allegation. The prosecutor will take into account the severity of the crime, but removing any more categories from the Bill would unnecessarily weaken the reassurance to service personnel and veterans. We must remember that it is a high threshold and not a bar. I hope that he is reassured by my words.

Stephen Timms: By accepting that change is necessary in the case of torture, the Minister is surely accepting that there is a problem here and that war crimes need to be excluded in the same way, otherwise, we run exactly the risks that nobody wants to see.

Leo Docherty: I accept the sincerity with which the right hon. Gentleman makes his point. The bottom line is that, because the prosecutor will retain the agency to pursue a prosecution in the event of a grave allegation, that will provide for the required investigation. It will

not make more likely the ICC pursuing a prosecution of a member of our armed forces. I hope that he takes reassurance from the fact that this is a high threshold, and not a bar, to prosecutions. If there is a case to answer, the prosecutor will make sure that it is answered.

I shall conclude my remarks in relation to Lords amendment 1 by saying that these proposed amendments go a very long way to addressing the concerns of the House of Lords in respect of relevant offences. I therefore urge that these amendments be accepted in lieu of their Lordships' amendment 1.

I will move now to Lords amendment 2, which seeks to introduce artificial timelines for the progress of investigations, including what appears to be an arbitrary cut-off point at six months for referral to the Service Prosecuting Authority, and a power for the Judge Advocate General to make directions in respect of investigations. The Government do not support introducing any such legislative limitations on the investigative process, not least as they would bring the real risk that to do so could lead to a contravention of our domestic and international legal obligations. They would also bring inconsistency of approach as these limitations would not apply to service police investigations in the UK, or to those conducted by civilian police forces.

I am also strongly of the view that it would be premature to propose any changes to the investigative process while Sir Richard Henriques's review of investigative processes in relation to overseas operations is still in progress. I will briefly set out the key reasons why the Government are resisting the Lords amendment.

The timescales in the amendment are operationally unrealistic. They do not take account of the nature of investigations on overseas operations and could put us in breach of our international obligations to investigate serious crimes effectively. Where the service police have reason to believe that an offence may have been committed, they have a legal duty to investigate it. Artificial timelines and restrictions placed on them in respect of the conduct of investigations would clearly prevent them from carrying out effective investigations and impinge on their statutory independence.

1.45 pm

Subsection (2) includes a requirement for referral of investigations to the service prosecuting authority and sets an arbitrary timeline for that. However, a referral threshold—the evidence sufficiency test—already exists in the Armed Forces Act 2006. Furthermore, section 116 of that Act contains a statutory obligation on the service police to consult the service prosecuting authority before deciding not to refer certain serious cases.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his position—it is a long overdue promotion and a vast improvement on what went before. He said that the Henriques investigation will make recommendations. In Committee, I tabled a series of amendments that would get to the heart of the matter. The real issue in the Bill is the length of investigations. I accept that it should not be arbitrary. In Committee, I proposed that investigations would have to be brought before a judge to ensure that at least there were grounds for them to continue. If the idea is to let the Bill go through now and make changes later, surely we should make them in this Bill rather than miss that opportunity.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention and note his long-standing interest in the Bill and the issues more broadly. We must have confidence in the Henriques review. I do not believe that there is a tension between a good outcome for the review and the necessity of passing the Bill in good order. However, if the right hon. Gentleman writes to me with those concerns, I would be pleased to write to Justice Henriques to suggest that he include them in the scope of his inquiry.

Mr Jones: I am grateful for the Minister's offer to do that, but the problem, which I will address later, with the Bill is that it is being done ad hoc. The Minister's predecessor promised that investigation would be in the Armed Forces Bill. Lo and behold, it is not and has been kicked into the review. If we are really to address the issue of veterans being reinvestigated, the problem is the length of the investigations, not whether there should be prosecutions at the end. That is a judicial test. That is the mess that the Government have got into with the entire process.

Mr Davis *rose*—

Leo Docherty: I will give way to my right hon. Friend.

Mr Davis: I entirely agree with the point that the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) just made. The issue starts with the investigative mechanisms inside the Ministry of Defence. My hon. Friend does not need to take it just from us; he should look at the comments of Justice Blackett, who, as a former JAG, was expert in the matter and understood it all too well.

Leo Docherty: I acknowledge the contributions of both right hon. Members. I agree that the length of investigations is the recurring problem, but I point out that since the early days of our military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, our ability to carry out rigorous and timely investigations has radically improved. That should be borne in mind when we consider the Bill.

Closing down or restricting the investigative timeline as subsection (3) of the Lords amendment would do raises the risk of contravening our legal obligations to investigate allegations of serious crimes effectively and presents the serious risk of the ICC determining that we are unwilling or unable to investigate alleged offences on overseas operations properly. An effective investigation is led by the evidence, on a case-by-case basis, not carried out under the shadow of arbitrary timescales.

Furthermore, and of equal concern, is that we could also fail to clear the names of our own forces or fail to provide much needed closure to the families of deceased personnel if investigations are curtailed in this way. Lords amendment 2 would introduce a novel role for the Service Prosecuting Authority and for the Judge Advocate General to make direction in relation to investigations. Neither of those new roles is necessary.

While we accept that there may have been shortcomings in some of the early investigations in Iraq, that is simply not the case now. All elements of the armed forces, including the service police, have come a long way since then. Lessons have been learned. Processes, policies, training and education have all been updated to reflect the experiences of those early days and matters that have arisen since. Lords amendment 2 is

[*Leo Docherty*]

therefore not only unnecessary, but unworkable and would seriously risk the UK's failing to meet its legal obligations. I therefore strongly urge the House to reject it.

Lords amendment 3 removes clause 12 and will mean that future Governments are not required by statute to consider whether to make a derogation under article 15 of the European convention on human rights in relation to significant overseas operations. The ability under article 15 to derogate in appropriate circumstances will remain, and the Government will still have the freedom, when committing the armed forces to significant operations, to derogate from the ECHR. That is why the Government have agreed to Lords amendment 3.

Lords amendment 4 carves out claims by service personnel and veterans from the limitation longstops in part 2 of the Bill. The urge to give special consideration to our service personnel who make great sacrifices to serve us is noble, but I believe that the amendment is unnecessary, not only for reasons that I will come on to, but because it would be discriminatory to single out service people in this way.

The limitations longstops in part 2 of the Bill have been introduced to help address the difficulties the MOD has faced in defending civil claims arising from historical overseas military operations, as the longstops provide greater legal certainty and greater certainty to service personnel and veterans that they will not be called upon many years after operations have ended to give evidence about potentially traumatic events relevant to a claim. That is at the heart of protecting our service personnel and veteran community against the legacy of lawfare as experienced following operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What is also important for service personnel is that these measures may also help reduce criminal investigations many years or decades after operations have ended. That is because in future, the longstops will likely encourage any civil claims to be brought sooner, and any associated criminal allegations are also therefore likely to be investigated sooner.

Lords amendment 4 concerns the fact that the limitation longstops in part 2 would apply to service personnel and veterans and civilians alike. However, I strongly believe that the impact on our service personnel and veterans would in practice have been minimal. The vast majority of service personnel and veterans already bring timely claims. Our analysis of the relevant figures indicates that around 94% of claims from service personnel and veterans arising from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were brought within six years of the date of the incident or the date of knowledge. What that means is that any carving out of claims by service personnel from the longstops would have very little practical impact.

It is true that based on our analysis of historical claims, 6% of service personnel brought their claims after six years from the date of knowledge or incident. The Government clearly have a role to play in ensuring that potential claimants know about the measures we are introducing in the Bill. We will therefore make service personnel aware that a claim in connection with an overseas operation will have to be brought within the relevant time periods.

Mr Kevan Jones: The Minister has said he does not want to discriminate against people, but with this measure he is discriminating against members of the armed forces. He refers to claims being brought against the MOD, but a lot of those cases are actually brought by members of the armed forces. He says that 6% will potentially be discriminated against, and we heard evidence about that in Committee.

I will give the Minister one practical example. The Snatch Land Rover case came before the courts way after the fact, because it came out in the Chilcot review. Families were able to take those cases forward outside of the limitation time. There is an idea that somehow people can get a case out of limitation times without very good arguments, but that is difficult. What this measure is doing is taking the rights that we all share as individuals under the Limitation Act 1980 and saying that they do not apply to people who have served in our armed forces. That is wrong.

Leo Docherty: I do not share the right hon. Gentleman's analysis. We have to bear in mind the fact that 6% is a small number. However, it is still too high, and we will work to get it down to zero.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the limitation longstops will cover only a small subset of the personal injury claims brought by current and former service personnel against the Ministry of Defence—those connected with overseas operations. Additionally, personnel will continue to have access to the armed forces compensation scheme. Let me conclude by confirming that part 2 of the Bill will not breach the armed forces covenant, which states:

“Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.”

The primary focus of the covenant is to help ensure that service personnel and veterans are not disadvantaged in comparison with civilians in the same position. Indeed, the longstops in part 2 will apply in the same way to all claimants bringing claims connected with overseas operations against the MOD, whether they are military personnel, civil servants, contractors or local nationals. Everyone, military or civilian, who is deployed on an overseas operation is treated equally in that respect. I therefore urge the House to reject the amendment.

Lords amendment 5 would require the Secretary of State to establish a duty of care standard for current and former service personnel and, where appropriate, their families, and would require the Secretary of State to provide an update in the armed forces covenant annual report. I would like to begin by saying that we take our responsibilities to our service personnel and veterans extremely seriously. On Tuesday 13 April, the Secretary of State published a written ministerial statement setting out as a matter of record the support that is, and will continue to be, available. First, that makes clear that service personnel are entitled to receive legal support where they face criminal allegations or civil claims that relate to actions taken during their service and where they were performing their duties. Legal advice and support are also available whenever people are required to give evidence at inquests and inquiries, and in litigation.

Secondly, a range of welfare support and mental health support is routinely offered to all service personnel. The potential impact of operations on a serviceperson's

mental health is well recognised, and there are provisions in place to help manage and mitigate those impacts as far as possible. Additionally, the Office for Veterans' Affairs works closely with the MOD and Departments across Government, the devolved Administrations, charities and academia to ensure that veterans' needs are met.

Significant progress has been made to ensure that our service personnel and veterans have access to a comprehensive package of legal, pastoral and mental health support, so we believe that it is unnecessary to establish a statutory duty of care. Not only is Lords amendment 5 unnecessary but it could result in unintended consequences, and would be likely to lead to an increase in litigation, which would mean more of our people being subject to potentially lengthy and stressful court proceedings, which is profoundly undesirable and contrary to the Bill's objectives. Notions of moral and pastoral duties are extremely difficult to define adequately, and there is a real risk that attempting to do so in legislation would lead to more, rather than less, litigation and greater uncertainty. We are concerned that as allegations may occur in operational theatres involving commanding officers, the Royal Military Police and service personnel, the amendment might have unintended consequences that would undermine our operational effectiveness. The Government are clear about their responsibilities to provide the right support to our personnel, both serving and veterans, and to seek to improve and build on that wherever necessary. I do not believe that setting a standard duty of care in the Bill is necessary, so the Government cannot support Lords amendment 5.

Lords amendments 6 to 8 are minor and technical, and are simply drafting improvements. All in all, I urge the House to accept the Government amendments in lieu of Lords amendment 1, and to reject Lords amendments 2, 4 and 5 so that we can fulfil our solemn obligations for greater legal protection for our service personnel and our veteran community.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): May I also congratulate the Minister on his appointment and welcome him to the Dispatch Box?

2 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I congratulate and warmly welcome the Minister for Defence People and Veterans to this, his first—and, I am sure, not the last—Front-Bench role. It is at this point that, as the departmental Whip, he might have wished he had paid more attention to the content of the debates on the Bill than to winning the votes, but he brings a wealth of expertise to his post from six years in the Scots Guards and from serving as the Member of Parliament for Aldershot, and I think the House has already heard this afternoon that he will make a very good fist of his new role. We wish him well.

We will miss the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) in a mixed sort of way. He has been a roadblock to reason during the passage of the Bill through Parliament, but no one can fault his passion or his sense of mission. His letter of resignation last night to the Prime Minister lays bare the failings of the Government, not just across the breadth of veterans' concerns, but in the very character of the Prime Minister and his Government. In it, the hon. Gentleman said:

“we continue to say all the right things”

yet

“fail to match that with what we deliver”.

I am glad to have heard the new Minister say today that the Government promise legislation on Northern Ireland shortly. We will look hard at that, but when it comes to dealing with the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland, we remain committed to the only way forward, which must be based on the Good Friday agreement, and in particular on the broad consensus reached at Stormont House with victims at its heart.

The Minister was probably responsible for this as the Whip, but I am delighted to say that, unlike the previous stages of the Bill in this House, we have plenty of time this afternoon to deal with the Lords amendments. I pay tribute to the peers who led on each of the four amendments before us: Lord Robertson of Port Ellen on Lords amendment 1; Lord Dannatt on Lords amendment 5; Lord Thomas of Gresford on Lords amendment 2; and Lord Faulkner and Lord Tunnicliffe on Lords amendment 4. Each of the amendments had strong Crossbench backing, each had the most senior military members of the Lords signed up and each was passed with a big majority in the other place. I say to Government Members that not a single Conservative peer spoke in favour of the Government or against these four amendments during the last stage in the House of Lords. I hope that gives them pause for thought about just how isolated their Ministers are on these amendments and how they have failed to convince an ever-widening group of distinguished individuals, experts and specialist groups about the Bill.

Mr David Davis: Am I correct in believing that Lord Mackay—an ex-Law Officer in a Conservative Government—actually supported the amendment?

John Healey: I believe that if the right hon. Gentleman consults Lords *Hansard*, he will see that Lord Mackay was speaking to another amendment. I am talking about the four main amendments that are before us today.

I know there has been a long-running problem. The Labour party accepts and recognises the problem of baseless allegations and legal claims arising from Iraq and Afghanistan under both Labour and Conservative Governments. But the Bill, unamended, is not the solution, even though we have worked hard from the outset to forge consensus on the changes needed to make the Bill into legislation that best serves the interests of British troops, British justice and British military standing in the world. I take a perhaps old-fashioned view that it is our duty in this House and the other place to make this legislation fit for purpose, and ensure that it is a new legal framework for this country when we have in future to commit our servicemen and women to conflict overseas.

I thank and pay tribute to the work of the organisations that have been most active in helping parliamentarians in both Houses during the passage of this Bill with their expertise and views. Those organisations include Freedom from Torture, Reprieve, the Royal British Legion, the Centre for Military Justice and the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers. I also pay tribute to Members on both sides of this House, particularly the 15 who served with our Front-Bench colleagues on the Public Bill Committee and who have contributed so fully to the debates that we have had so far.

[John Healey]

Let me turn to the Lords amendments on which I will concentrate. The reason that no Tory peers spoke in support of the Government on these amendments is because the Bill just does not do what it says on the tin—that is, protect British forces personnel serving overseas from vexatious legal claims and from repeat investigations.

I turn to Lords amendment 2. More than 99% of the 4,000-plus allegations against our troops arising from Iraq and Afghanistan would not have been affected at all by this Bill, because it relates only to the prosecution's process and the prosecutorial system. That is why Lord Boyce, former Chief of the Defence Staff, said:

“The Bill's significant emphasis on presumption against prosecution as a way of relieving some of the stress of legal proceedings” is misplaced, and that,

“it is the investigation and reinvestigation process that...so...wears people down.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 April 2021; Vol. 811, c. 1170.]

I turn to Lords amendment 4. Part 2 of the Bill strips forces and forces' families of their current rights to civil justice and compensation if they suffer injury or even death as a result of MOD negligence. That is why Lord Stirrup, also a former Chief of the Defence Staff, said:

“It seems strange to me that a Bill with the avowed purpose of providing government reassurance to service personnel seems intent on preventing those very personnel from seeking redress from that same Government.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 April 2021; Vol. 811, c. 1222.]

I turn to Lords amendment 1. The presumption against prosecution after five years increases the risk of British service personnel being dragged before the International Criminal Court. That is why the former Judge Advocate General—the military's most senior legal figure—said in evidence to the Bill Committee itself:

“What it actually does is increase the risk of service personnel appearing before the International Criminal Court.”—[*Official Report, Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Public Bill Committee*, 8 October 2020; c. 117-18, Q234.]

Of course, the ICC's chief prosecutor has indeed written to the Defence Secretary while the Bill has been in Parliament

“to ensure that the exemption clause extends to all crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court”.

Otherwise it would “render such cases admissible” before the International Criminal Court.

I turn to Lords amendment 3. I am pleased that the Government have accepted the case for removing clause 12, which would have required Ministers to consider derogating from the European convention on human rights before committing British troops to overseas conflicts. We challenged this with a Labour amendment at the very earliest stage of the Bill's passage through the Commons. The decision to drop the clause reasserts the UK's commitment to an important treaty that Britain played a leading role in drafting. It is important too in allowing an avenue of justice for both British forces personnel and for victims.

Let me turn to the core of the debate and concern in the House of Lords, which is Lords amendment 1 and the Government's counter-proposals before the House this afternoon. The Secretary of State's decision to

accept parts of Lord Robertson's amendment to exclude torture, genocide and war crimes from the presumptions is welcome, and it is testament to the efforts of Lord Robertson, many other groups and, indeed, Members of this House. I pay particular tribute to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), who together have banged the drum about the importance of torture not being carved out from provisions in the future.

The acts that Lord Robertson and so many Members of the upper House were concerned about are illegal and immoral. Under all circumstances, they must be investigated and, if there are grounds for the allegations, there must be prosecutions and punishment. The Minister talked about rectifying an omission with the Government's amendments in lieu of Lords amendment 1. However, the Government are still picking and choosing some of the crimes that are covered by the Geneva conventions. Today they have picked out torture and genocide, but they are excluding the more general case of war crimes. Torture and genocide should never have been included as offences within this Bill. Like sexual offences, there is no justification—there can never be justification—for them, so the decision now to exclude them is certainly a good step forward, and we welcome it and will support the Government's amendments in lieu of Lords amendment 1. But can I urge the Minister, in the time between the consideration of these Lords amendments in this House and their being discussed again in the other place, to accept in full those crimes specified in Lord Robertson's amendment 1, including war crimes, as excluded offences?

Mr Kevan Jones: Clearly those are the arguments we made in Committee, asking why sexual offences were excluded but these very serious crimes were not. If the Government have given way on two, I have not yet heard an explanation from the Minister as to why war crimes are not going to be excluded. It is not only right that they should be excluded but, in terms of the UK's international reputation, it would save a lot of embarrassment. I want to avoid, and I think everyone wants to avoid, members of our armed forces ending up in the International Criminal Court.

John Healey: Indeed, my right hon. Friend makes an important point. I have touched already on the risk that this will undermine Britain's international reputation for fully upholding and adhering to many of the international rules and laws that we were instrumental in drafting and creating after the second world war. The Minister describes torture and genocide as omissions from the provisions of the Bill, and he rectifies that with his proposed amendments in lieu of Lords amendment 1, but it is not clear, as my right hon. Friend says, why other crimes covered by the Geneva conventions, particularly war crimes, are still omitted, because exactly the same arguments apply to those as to the ones the Government have rightly conceded on and reflected in their amendments in lieu.

Let me spell it out for the Minister. Article 8 of the Rome statute says that war crimes are:

“Grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions”.

This dates back to 1949, just after the second world war. These grave breaches include:

“Wilful killing... Wilfully causing great suffering, or serious injury... Compelling a prisoner of war or other...to serve in the forces of a hostile Power”.

That is important because, as both the Judge Advocate General and the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, and Members on both sides of the House this afternoon, have made clear, not excluding these offences makes it more likely that British soldiers risk being prosecuted and pursued in the ICC.

As my right hon. Friend rightly said, it is also about our adherence to and respect for international law. If we ourselves meet the highest standard of legal military conduct, we can hold other countries to account when their forces fall short. If we do otherwise, it compromises our country's proud reputation for upholding the rules-based international order that Britain itself has helped to construct since the days of Churchill and Attlee.

I ask the Minister and his colleagues in the MOD, when the Bill returns to the other place, to include war crimes as excluded offences, along with the other exclusions that he lists in his amendments in lieu of Lords amendment 1.

Mr David Davis: I think the right hon. Gentleman thought I was trying to trick him when I said that Lord Mackay had voted for Lords amendment 1. The point I was making is that Lord Mackay is a previous Law Officer—a very senior Law Officer in a Tory Government—and he voted for George Robertson's amendment, reinforcing its force, not undermining it.

2.15 pm

John Healey: I am so grateful that I gave way again to the right hon. Gentleman. He rightly believed that I thought his challenge was intended to trick me. I thought he was arguing—this was not my recollection, but I was not entirely certain because I do not have the *Hansard* record in front of me—that Lord Mackay had not spoken out against the Government's position and had not supported Lord Robertson's amendment. My main point—this gives me an opportunity to repeat it—is that no Conservative peer spoke up for the Government and against the amendments we are discussing this afternoon.

I hope that gives not just Government Back Benchers but those on the Front Bench pause for thought about just how isolated the Government are on these issues and how, during the passage of the Bill, they have failed—this is certainly not the responsibility of the Minister—to convince a wide range of experts and specialist groups, and the forces themselves, particularly those with service experience, that they are doing the right thing in this Bill.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Lord Mackay is a very old gentleman, and I am a historian—of adequate standard only. Surely, the conduct of the British troops in the second world war—the trusted Tommies—gave us the moral authority that we used at the Nuremberg war trials, something that Lord Mackay will remember himself.

John Healey: This debate gets richer with every intervention I take, which probably suggests that I should stop talking and allow others to contribute. If the hon. Gentleman feels he is only an adequate historian, I am an inadequate historian. I did not know that. It has helped the strength of the argument that I am trying to make, as well as the information that the House has this afternoon.

Bob Stewart: I thank my friend the shadow Secretary of State for giving way. I have been tussling in my mind with why a war crime is different from torture, crimes against humanity or genocide, but I have come to understand—probably because I am a bit silly or stupid—what a war crime is. An example of a war crime is getting a whole load of the enemy when they have surrendered, putting them up against a wall and shooting them. That is a war crime, and I think it is quite a good thing that we should be against that.

John Healey: The right hon. and gallant Gentleman has experience of conflict. I do not know whether a legal mind, which mine certainly is not, would regard that as wilful killing, but as such, it is probably an act that is beyond the categories of specific crimes cited in the Government's amendment that excludes them from the provisions of the Bill. That underlines the case I am making, for which I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, that that category of Geneva convention-defined crimes, including war crimes, really must be excluded from the presumption in this Bill; otherwise, we face the risks that we are discussing this afternoon of exposing our forces to potential action from the International Criminal Court, which none of us wants to see, and of dragging down the reputation of this country for upholding in full and fully adhering to the international rules and standards of military legal conduct.

I turn to Lords amendment 2, on investigations. I said earlier that the Bill does not yet do what it says on the tin. We were told that this Bill would bring an end to the harassment of forces personnel through repeated legal claims, but because it deals only with prosecutions and not with investigations, it will not do that. Only 27 prosecutions arising from Iraq and Afghanistan have been registered, yet 3,400 allegations were considered by the Iraq Historic Allegations Team and 670 from Operation Northmoor. Therefore, less than 1% of allegations were prosecuted. The problem here is investigations: the serious, consistent problems that lie in a system of investigation that has proved to be lacking in speed, soundness, openness and a duty of care to alleged victims or the troops involved. Those are all problems well before the point of decision about prosecution, which is the point at which the provisions of this Bill kick in.

The Minister describes the proposals in Lords amendment 2 as somehow premature and cites Henriques. I am aware, of course, that the Government have set up a review on this, but there have been three reviews already and he might want to ask his officials to dig them out for him. There have been three reviews in the past five years, with at least 80 recommendations on investigations that the Government could act on now. The Minister and his predecessor promised us that investigations reform would be a matter for the Armed Forces Bill, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) has said, yet when that Bill was brought before the House nothing was included.

Mr Kevan Jones: I have sympathy with the Lords amendment on investigations, but I think that the new clauses 6, 7 and 8 that I tabled in Committee would have been far better. My new clause 8—I think it was that one—sought to put a time limit on minor investigations; they could go before a judge and be dismissed, and that would reduce the numbers. The other thing is the need

[Mr Kevan Jones]

to have judicial oversight of the investigations. That is not saying that we do not investigate things; it is about having rigour in ensuring that investigations are being done in a timely way, and can carry on if more evidence needs collecting, and that, likewise, reinvestigations can be opened only where a judge determines that new and compounding evidence is brought forward. That is the gaping hole still in this Bill even if we agree to the Lords amendment, which I have sympathy with. Without that, my right hon. Friend is right: this Bill does not pass the Ronseal test, because it does not do what it says on the tin.

John Healey: My right hon. Friend is right to say that there is a gaping hole. This is the gaping hole in this Bill, and it could be fixed. It could be fixed in the way that was proposed and passed to us by the Lords in their amendment 2. I guess the Minister might want to ask his officials to dig out my right hon. Friend's new clauses 6, 7 and 8 from Committee, because, having served in this House for a long time with him, I can bet strongly that those new clauses will resurface in debate on the Armed Forces Bill, because once he gets his teeth into something, he is reluctant to let it go.

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend is correct, but the problem is that the previous Minister promised that investigations would be part of the Armed Forces Bill and, lo and behold, they were not there. The Government have therefore had two chances to put this right and clearly have still not done it.

John Healey: Indeed. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not going to get tempted on to the Armed Forces Bill any further in case you call me to order. Let me address my remarks to this Bill and these Lords amendments, particularly Lords amendment 2.

I have to say to the Minister that I am pleased that the Secretary of State has now taken a personal interest in this Bill, because that is helpful all round and I hope it will ensure that we can see it go smoothly on to the statute book. Lords amendment 2 proposes a tried and tested mechanism to improve investigations. It is not arbitrary, as the Minister told the House earlier. It is not a time limit; it ensures timely, not time-limited investigations. It is not unrealistic, because it has been tried and tested in civilian law. This is one of the reasons why the former Judge Advocate General is so keen on it. I am conscious that the Secretary of State believes that the proposals in Lords amendment 2 are somehow novel or that they may prejudice independent investigations. So I say to the Minister, and I have communicated this today to the Secretary of State, that they are not novel and they will not prejudice the independence of investigations, for the following reasons.

In civilian law, which is the model and the principle that we take here, there is in section 127 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 a six-month time limit on investigations for certain offences. It establishes the target, if we like, not a hard limit, and focuses the mind of the investigators. That is the principle that Lords amendment 2 seeks to establish.

On prejudicing independent investigations, the principle of judicial oversight of investigations has already been established, not just in civilian law but in military practice. I quote the former Judge Advocate General, who said in evidence to the Public Bill Committee:

"I introduced something called 'Better Case Management in the Court Martial', towards the end of my time as the Judge Advocate General. That puts time limits on investigations. The most important thing about it is that a case, early on, goes before a judge, and a judge then sets out a timetable of what various things should do."—[*Official Report, Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Public Bill Committee*, 8 October 2020; c. 116, Q231.]

In other words, it is not novel and does not prejudice the independence of investigations. It is a principle that is already established in the military system and established in statute in the civilian system. I hope the Minister will therefore accept the intent of Lords amendment 2, and that it is workable, is certainly in scope, is implementable and gives us the opportunity to fix really long-standing problems. I hope that he and the Government will start to see our proposals in this area as being additional to the current content of the Bill, not a direct challenge to it.

Let me move on to Lords amendment 4 and part 2 of the Bill. I cannot for the life of me I understand why the Government are asking their Back-Bench Members to support something that will strip away the existing rights of forces personnel and their families. It seems to me to be simply wrong for those who put their life on the line serving Britain overseas to have less access to compensation and justice than the UK civilians whom they defend or, indeed, their comrades whose service is largely UK-based.

Lords amendment 4 to part 2 of the Bill was designed to ensure that claims by troops or former service personnel are not blocked in all circumstances after six years, as they would otherwise be under the Bill. There are already safeguards in the Limitation Act 1980—at not just six years but three years—but this Bill now penalises a group of people by applying to them a unique deviation from that Act. It clearly constitutes a disadvantage for those armed forces personnel, their families and the veterans affected, and it directly breaches the armed forces covenant, as the director general of the Royal British Legion confirmed himself in evidence to the Public Bill Committee. Frankly, it really does beggar belief that Ministers are looking to strip from forces personnel and their families their right to justice—to penalise them instead of protecting them.

Let me put this into perspective, because I have sometimes heard Ministers dismiss this issue as affecting such a marginal, small group of people that it does not matter. Some of the cases that have eventually secured justice are deeply moving, deeply troubling and would have been blocked by this Bill. Numbers matter, but they are not the only criteria. Nevertheless, in the most recent financial year, the number of claims by forces personnel against the MOD for injuries was 2,796—up 70% on five years previously. Almost nine in 10 of those claims were for noise-induced hearing loss.

In speaking of hearing loss in evidence to the Public Bill Committee, the specialist forces solicitor Hilary Meredith said—and this points to the problem with the hard block after six years:

"In latent disease cases...it is not just about the diagnosis. Many people are diagnosed at death. It is about the connection to service. That connection to service may come much later down the line, and by that time they will be out of time to bring a claim."—[*Official Report, Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Public Bill Committee*, 6 October 2020; c. 18, Q30.]

It is plain wrong, and I hope that the Government will, at this late stage, reconsider giving those who put their lives on the line for Britain overseas less access to compensation than the UK civilians they defend. Since 2007, there have been at least 195 cases of troops that would have been caught by the Bill and prevented from pursuing a successful claim.

2.30 pm

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only people who will benefit from this Bill are the lawyers? I cannot for the life of me think why a Government would want to put into statute something that will discriminate against former members of our armed forces. This will clearly be a test case in litigation, and I cannot see what justification the Government will use when that litigation goes ahead for why they have scooped out a certain section of our society away from the Limitation Act, as he outlined. It would be better if they gave up now, rather than spend a lot of time later on—which they will—when this gets tested in the courts.

John Healey: My right hon. Friend says that he cannot see why the Government are pursuing this, but the director general of the Royal British Legion could. When he spoke to the Public Bill Committee, he said:

“I think it is protecting the MOD, rather than the service personnel”—[*Official Report, Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Public Bill Committee*, 8 October 2020; c. 86, Q163.]

He is right. When my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) pressed him and asked whether it would breach the armed forces covenant in his view, he said:

“That is what we think, yes.”—[*Official Report, Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Public Bill Committee*, 8 October 2020; c. 84, Q155.]

I turn to the last of the four main amendments at hand today, Lords amendment 5, which was moved in the other place by Lord Dannatt and is on the duty of care. One of the things that struck me most when talking to troops and their families who have been through the trauma of these long-running investigations is that they felt cut adrift—cut adrift from their chain of command and from the Ministry of Defence. The Public Bill Committee heard really clearly from Major Campbell. He gave dramatic evidence, and I am sure that the Minister has followed this; in fact, he was on the Committee, so he will have been there. When Major Campbell was asked what support the MOD gave him, he simply replied: “there was none.”

Of course, for veterans, it is even worse. For them, there is nothing—not even the chain of command—there for them. Although some of the previous decisions that the Government have taken—for instance, to cover the legal costs of those involved in the Iraq Historic Allegations Team investigations—were welcome, there should be and there can be a higher standard to reach for us in this regard.

When Lord Dannatt moved this amendment successfully in the Lords, he said:

“Defence priorities change; the fortunes of military charities fluctuate; Ministers come and go; but the law does not change. Amendment 14 would bring into law the good ideas and intentions of well-meaning Ministers and officials with whom we are currently united in common cause but who are strangely reluctant to enshrine the fruits of their endeavours in a Bill which will become

an Act of Parliament and thus part of our law—a law to protect our people for all time from vexatious investigations and prosecutions.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 April 2021; Vol. 811, c. 1244.]

The former Veterans Minister wrote in his resignation letter last night:

“I remain genuinely appalled by the experiences of some of the Nation’s finest people who have served in the Armed Forces.”

I say to the Minister, we can do better than this duty of care, particularly when the MOD has forces personnel and veterans subject to investigation or prosecution. I hope he will now accept this, so that we can establish a new duty of care standard and that legal, pastoral and mental health support is made available as a matter of course and a matter of duty by the MOD for those who are put under pressure and under investigation or prosecution.

I am coming to my conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are now legislating for the future. The Bill is not a framework that is fit for that future point when we must again commit our forces to conflict overseas. The Government are still getting important parts of the Bill badly wrong. I continue to believe strongly that, ultimately, the Government, Labour and the armed forces all want the same thing: we want to protect British troops and we want to protect British values. That is not, and should not be, a matter of party politics.

I end today as I ended our debates on Report back in November by saying this: it is late, but it is still not too late for Ministers to think again about the best way both to protect service personnel from vexatious litigation and to ensure that those who do commit serious crimes on operations abroad are properly prosecuted and punished. I urge the Minister and the Government to do just that in the very final stages of this Bill in Parliament.

Mr David Davis: May I declare an interest as a trustee of a regimental association? Let me reinforce my congratulations to the Minister at the Dispatch Box. I, too, in my time, have gone from the omertà of the Whips Office to the garrulousness of the Dispatch Box. It is not an easy transition, and he has carried it off with aplomb and class, and I look forward to a great future for him. What he has not been able to do for himself is manufacture time between his appointment and the consideration of these matters.

I will speak solely to Lords amendment 1—Lord Robertson’s amendment. I will broadly support the Government today with some caveats that the Minister will hear in a minute, but on the other amendments—in fact on all the amendments—I recommend right here and now to the Lords that, when we send them back, they send them back modified to take on board some of the intelligent comments that we have heard from across the House. The Minister then should look very hard at accepting them, because, next time around, I would be inclined to support the Lords amendments, as they have been very considerate in the way that they have presented them.

I also know from my experience as a Minister quite how difficult it is to undertake a 180 degree turn on a massively central point in a Bill. I commend the Government for doing almost exactly that on Lords amendment 1, because it reflects very closely what I and the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) put forward on Report. However, it is an almost 180 degree turn, but it is one that was plainly needed. As the right

[Mr David Davis]

hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) has said, it was supported by the most august panel of people in the Lords that one could possibly pick for a subject such as this: six Chiefs of the Defence staff—people who do not willingly vote against the Government of the day; an ex-Secretary-General of NATO; a former head of MI5; two former independent reviewers of terrorism legislation; a former National Security Adviser; and several other senior military figures.

John Healey: And bishops.

Mr Davis: The bishops often vote against the Government. This is something where the military securitat—as it were—do not vote against the Government. They are people whose patriotism is unquestionable and whose knowledge is unparalleled in this area, so the Minister should pay great attention to them and take notice.

The aim of the Bill, as we have heard several times, is to shield our military personnel from being pursued by vexatious claims—I was going to say something rude about lawyers. It is a proper and worthwhile ambition and one that we should fully support. The Government have rightly made it clear—and this is the point on which I support them—that torture and genocide can never be acceptable and have excluded them from a five-year presumption against prosecution.

However, even with these concessions, there remains a fundamental problem. The Government have failed to exclude war crimes from the list of offences, as has been made clear by the Opposition spokesman. I asked the Minister whether he would clarify for me how he distinguishes between war crimes, torture, and genocide as subjects properly excluded from the Bill. Although he made a very skilful response he could not do it and I do not think anybody could do it. As my right hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) made plain, war crimes include wilful killing: in the case he raised, the wilful killing of prisoners; the wilful killing of innocent civilians; and wilfully putting people through miserable pain or suffering. All those things are, quite properly, war crimes. They are, quite properly, things we would be held to account for by the rest of the world, let alone our soldiers being held to account by our courts and our judicial procedure.

I firmly believe that we cannot protect our own soldiers without correcting that exclusion. That is not just my opinion; it is the opinion of many of our experienced military leaders. Take Lord Robertson, the former Labour Minister—he was both Defence Secretary and NATO Secretary-General—who authored the amendment. He argued that the Bill would create

“a two-tier justice system in which troops acting for us abroad would be treated differently from other civilians in society.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 April 2021; Vol. 811, c. 1190.]

That cannot be right and that cannot be just. Indeed, it is not what our troops stand up for. It is not what they fight for. When they go abroad to fight, they do so because they stand up for our civilised values, and this is one of them. There is a certain quirk to that.

The Bill must give confidence to military personnel, complainants and other countries that the United Kingdom remains a stalwart upholder of the rule of law. There can be no greater test of our national character and no

more important measure of our moral fibre than maintaining the highest of standards in this most difficult of tasks. We must get this right. If we get it wrong, we will be in the shameful position—this was made clear several times by the Labour party spokesman, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne—of putting our troops at risk of being summoned before the International Criminal Court. The chief prosecutor of that court wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence. When I saw the account of that, I wrote to the chief prosecutor and received a clarification. War crimes are plainly in the court’s sights. If somebody is alleged to have been guilty of a war crime and we exercise the presumption against prosecution as stated in the Bill, they will end up in front of the ICC. That is quite clear to me. That is not a risk, but a certainty.

Mr Kevan Jones: In Committee, we spoke at lot about the famous case of Marine A. Under this measure, that individual would not have been prosecuted after five years, but it is clear that he would have ended up in the International Criminal Court for what he did. He would not have been given the hearing he had in this country, not just in terms of the fairness of our judicial system but also on appeal, taking into account the specific nature of the reasons why that incident occurred. To me, it would be absolutely awful if such individuals were found before an international court, rather than a court in this country.

Mr Davis: For people watching who will not remember Marine A, he is a marine who effectively executed a wounded prisoner and went to prison for it.

Bob Stewart: Murdered.

Mr Davis: Yes, murdered is the right word.

What would that lead to? It would lead to members of the British military being arraigned before a court that is traditionally used for arraigning tyrants and people we would view as monsters. What would that say about our nation’s moral compass? I shudder to think how people would use it. Of course, those who would use that impugning of our position would be our opponents, who themselves have no moral compass. They would be the first to use it against us. It would embolden our adversaries and be a bad day for Britain.

I say this to the Minister: I will support the Government today, even though I am unhappy with that exclusion, because they have made a major concession in areas on which I and the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) pressed them. However, I will also say to the Minister that if the Lords send it back again and insist on the exclusion of war crimes, I will vote for it next time and I will encourage my many colleagues who are concerned about the Bill to vote that way, too. The Minister cannot invent time, but it will give him time to look at all the amendments and think through carefully what is really in the interests of our soldiers and our country. On that basis, I support it.

2.45 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I congratulate the Minister for Defence People and Veterans. Many Members across the House are not only pleased by his elevation to the Front Bench, but relieved to see him there. I wish him all the best in his new role.

A major frustration for those of us involved in earlier stages of the Bill and in Committee was the refusal of the former Minister to consider even the most reasonable and uncontroversial amendments. That meant that the Bill sent to the Lords was fundamentally flawed. What we have back is a slight improvement on a flawed Bill, rather than what we were looking for, which was a competent piece of legislation. The Bill was sold as legislation that would tackle vexatious claims, but throughout its passage the evidence we received, both written and in Committee, pointed to the problems arising from flawed investigations. Nothing in the Bill will improve service justice, and much of it will damage the UK's international reputation.

We rightly expect our personnel to conduct themselves with the highest professional standards, and the vast majority do. Let me take this opportunity to thank them for their service in what is often a challenging and dangerous environment. We must have robust systems for investigation that are understood, and in which personnel, Members of the House, our allies worldwide, and members of the public have confidence. That is the importance of this issue. We must be able to stand by the Bill and say, "This will do what it says on the tin." I do not think we are convinced of that yet.

We welcome Lords amendment 1 from Lord Robertson, but although the Government's proposed amendment in place of that removes the presumption against prosecution for torture, crimes against humanity and genocide, as many have already said—I think we will hear more about this—it retains the presumption against prosecution for war crimes. The right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) has already given us a graphic illustration of what that means and why war crimes must be included. The Minister has tried to explain this issue, and I commend his efforts to explain that the prosecutor will retain agency, but we should not be leaving it to the prosecutor. We should be getting this right in the Bill, and ensuring it is correct at this stage.

There is no justification for protecting those accused of war crimes. The problem is what such a measure does for our international reputation, and we should not have to stand up in this place to point that out—it is blindingly obvious. War crimes also come under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, so despite the efforts of Lord Robertson, the revised Government amendment still leaves troops at risk of being hauled in front of the ICC. That is one of the big problems with the Bill.

The Government's amendment is an improvement on their original position, but it is far from satisfactory. I hope the Minister will take that point away and consider it. When the Bill returns to the Lords, I hope they will throw it back at us again. We have to get this right, and the Bill just needs the inclusion of that provision for it to be strengthened significantly.

Moving on to Lords amendment 2 from Lord Thomas, while we support the amendment, this brings us back to the manner in which investigations are conducted. The Bill was an opportunity to overhaul the system that is in place for investigations and, sadly, this seems to be an opportunity lost. Unless we establish proper structures and processes for investigations, and that will include independent investigators—we cannot be marking our own homework on this—I worry that personnel will remain vulnerable to repeated investigations and, indeed, investigations by the ICC.

The Minister made comments about the timescale of investigations involved under the amendment, saying that they were unrealistic. I have some sympathy for that position and understand the point that he is making. Many of us do not understand what it is like to be in the theatre of war under which these investigations would be carried out. However, some timescale, some independence and some urgency around investigations would result in a system in which we could all have a bit more confidence.

Jamie Stone: Does the hon. Lady agree that Lord Thomas's amendment 2 and the issue of duty of care, which has been touched on repeatedly in this debate, if not dealt with properly, could act, first, as a disincentive to serving personnel staying on in the services and, secondly, as a major disincentive to future recruitment?

Carol Monaghan: I thank the hon. Gentleman—yes, of course. We heard evidence directly from Major Robert Campbell in the Bill Committee, who has gone through 17 years of hell, of repeated investigations. There is no doubt that people looking at that—serving personnel and potential serving personnel—will consider their future career.

Mr Kevan Jones: The hon. Lady is right, but the missing point in this is investigations. It was heartbreaking to hear Robert Campbell's evidence to the Committee, but if the Bill goes through as it stands, there will be nothing to stop another case like Campbell's going forward in future. This has been sold as a way of stopping vexatious claims and investigations, but without change in investigations, it will not do that.

Carol Monaghan: And in fact could make it worse. If we throw the ICC into that as well, potentially, we could have a much worse situation for personnel who are facing prosecution.

On Lords amendment 3, any derogation from the European convention on human rights for future overseas operations would have set a damaging precedent for an international treaty—an international treaty that this country played a major role in drawing up. These proposals would have undermined the protections that the UK was so integral to establishing. We welcome Lords amendment 3 and are pleased that the Government have accepted it. It is one of those common-sense ones that should not have needed to come to this stage, but we have got there, so we are thankful for that.

On Lords amendment 4, I spoke on Second Reading and in Committee about the issue of the time limit on claims. One thing that was raised was that some personnel are told, while they are still serving, that they are unable to pursue a claim, which is false, or they are told by those higher up the chain of command that they do not have a valid claim. The nature of the armed forces is that, for many serving personnel, if they are told by their superiors that they are not able to do something, they will accept that. It is only when they find out years later that, actually, they do have a valid claim and they are able to pursue it, they will be able to take action, but with this six-year limit, that is problematic.

We very much welcome Lords amendment 4, but it does not go far enough. As has already been mentioned, it in effect creates an unfair two-tier system in which MOD civilian employees, or indeed the families of deceased personnel, will not be able to make claims

[Carol Monaghan]

beyond the six-year limit. So we will be supporting the amendment, but it is disappointing that it only applies to members of the armed forces.

The Government had the opportunity to strengthen Lords amendment 4 by widening it to apply to all, but instead they are rejecting it entirely so that everyone has the time limit applied. We have heard about those with hearing loss, and again I spoke in Committee about an individual whose significant hearing loss could not be pinpointed to one event and had got progressively worse. Certainly, the six-year limit would have caused problems for that individual to pursue a claim, as it would for claims relating to post-traumatic stress disorder, because that can manifest itself very differently in different people and it may be many years later.

I know the time limit is supposed to be from the point of diagnosis, not from the point of first symptoms, but even at the point of diagnosis the link would still need to be made to service, and if that was not done in a timely way, it would prevent further progress of a claim. Another such issue I have spoken about is that of the nuclear test veterans, who 60 or 70 years on are still looking for stuff, but they would be prevented from making any claims under this. It is notable that we should be making it easier for our personnel to make claims against the MOD when the MOD is seen to be negligent, but as has already been said, this legislation seems to be crafted specially to protect the MOD, not the personnel themselves. We should all be quite concerned about that, so we will be supporting Lords amendment 4 today.

Finally, on Lord Dannatt's amendment—Lords amendment 5—which ensures care and support for personnel involved in investigations, I cannot see why every Member of this place should not be supporting it. I know the Minister has spoken about the reasons why the Government are not supporting this, but if all these structures are in place just now, why do we still have personnel who are not getting that support at the moment? If that support is already there and is not working, then we do need something, and if it has to be statutory, then it should be statutory.

I will finish my comments by saying that I hope, with the change of Minister, that we do see a change of attitude. I know it will surprise Government Members, but occasionally Opposition Members may have points that are worth consideration. We are not always out to get you, although I will not be putting that on social media. I think there has to be an acknowledgment and a recognition of the experience that Members across the House can bring to legislation, particularly legislation such as this. I will, finally, just thank the Minister for his input today, and we certainly look forward to working with him in the future.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con) [V]: Let me begin by warmly congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) on his promotion. He started his Government career as the Parliamentary Private Secretary to me, so I congratulate him in particular on overcoming that disadvantage and acquiring a job that I know he will enjoy, and I am sure he will do it extremely well. I congratulate him too on the way he has handled the business this afternoon.

It is no easy task to deal with something this complex, and certainly not when given it at almost a moment's notice.

I want to follow on from what my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) has said. I support the Government's move to change their approach to Lords amendment 1, but like my right hon. Friend, I am concerned about whether they have gone far enough. Like everyone who has spoken so far and I am sure a large number of people more broadly, I support the intention of this Bill. It is clearly the right thing for us to do collectively to offer what reassurance we can to armed services personnel that they will not be pursued through the courts for offences that are either illegitimately alleged or interminably investigated. I also take the points that have been made about the need to improve investigation. However, like my right hon. Friend, I want to confine my remarks to Lords amendment 1 and the Government's amendment in lieu.

3 pm

The intention of any legislation is important, but just as important, if not more so, is what effect it is likely to have. Its intentions will only be supported if we avoid that legislation being counterproductive and make sure that its contents are inherently logical and consistent. I will make some remarks about both those things.

First, this Bill would clearly be counterproductive if, in seeking to reduce the prospect of domestic prosecution, it increased the prospect of international prosecution at the International Criminal Court. That is a real risk. My time as Attorney General involved attempting to make sure that the IHAT—Iraq Historic Allegations Team—process was as efficient as it could be, and I would not pretend that we succeeded. It was an extraordinarily difficult process that dragged on for an extremely long time, but it was, for most of us involved, the lesser of two evils, because we knew that if there was not an adequate process for the investigation and pursuance of such allegations domestically, there was a real risk of that process being undertaken by the International Criminal Court, which, for all its many advantages, if anything was taking longer to deal with cases. Given that the objective of the Bill is to remove the shadow of impending investigation and prosecution over our service personnel, it would clearly be counterproductive to move that obligation to the International Criminal Court instead. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been in contact with the ICC. He may want to make contact again to confirm that the suggestions the Government are making about the robustness of their provisions in the amendment in lieu will be accepted by the ICC.

As I say, I welcome the Government's move insofar as it goes, but that brings me to my next concern, which is about internal consistency of this legislation. The Bill installs additional restrictions on bringing a prosecution against a member of the armed forces. It does not—it is worth restating this point—involve a prohibition on such prosecution, in any case, and it would be wrong to misrepresent it in that way, but its restrictions apply only to what is described as a relevant offence. There are certain offences included in that description and certain offences specifically excluded. If we amend the Bill in the way that the Government seek through their amendment

in lieu of Lords amendment 1, offences specifically excluded would include crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and torture. Again, I support that change.

However, the Bill as it stands also includes, as others have mentioned, a range of sexual offences. That includes rape and serious sexual violence as well as some offences that come further down the scale of seriousness. That is important. My concern about lack of consistency arises if we are to put in place additional restrictions on prosecution of war crimes, some of them very serious, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) has mentioned, but do not impose those additional restrictions on a variety of sexual offences, some of them far less serious. The Minister could of course argue that it is not the seriousness of the offence in this context that matters most—perhaps what matters most is the likelihood of those offences arising in vexatious complaints—but it would help if he gave us some further explanation and detail in his concluding remarks.

It is worth being clear about how the Bill operates on a prosecutor's decision making; it does not operate on all of the so-called prosecutorial test. As hon. Members will know, there are two stages to a prosecutor's consideration of a case. The first is the evidential stage to look at the evidence before the prosecutor and determine whether the evidential test is met—whether, in effect, there is a better than 50% chance of securing a conviction. The Bill does not operate on that part of the prosecutor's work. It operates only on the second and subsequent test—the process is sequential—which is whether it is in the public interest to prosecute.

Two matters arise from that. First, if we are determining which offences to bring within the rubric of the Bill on the basis of their seriousness, it is worth recognising that if an offence passed the evidential test—if the prosecutor considered that a war crime had a better than 50% chance of getting a conviction—in most cases, I suspect it would be in the public interest to prosecute such an offence. Why then make it harder to do so when we do not intend to make it harder in relation to less serious—at least apparently—offences?

If, on the other hand, we are concerned about the likelihood of a vexatious complaint being made, it is again worth recognising that, in that sequential test, the evidential part comes first and it is much less likely that a spurious or vexatious allegation of a war crime would get as far as discussion of the second test—the public interest test—which is the point at which the provisions of the Bill apply.

There are reasons for us to be cautious about whether the Bill as the Government would have us amend it retains the sort of internal consistency and logic that all legislation of this kind should have, especially when its primary purpose is to offer reassurance about the way it will operate.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden, I support what the Government have done so far, but I have reservations about whether they have gone far enough. I will listen with interest to my hon. Friend the Minister when he winds up the debate, but I believe that further consideration of internal consistency will be required to put the Bill in the place we would all like it to be.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab) [V]: It is a privilege to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright). I begin by declaring an

interest as a British Army veteran. I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister on his appointment and welcome him to his important new post.

I rise to speak in a virtual sense in support of Lords amendment 1, which aims to remove torture, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes from the scope of the Bill. For the record, and I am grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for referencing it, the Lords amendment builds on the amendment that the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and I tabled on Report in November. That amendment was roundly defeated by the Government.

I was genuinely relieved to read the comments coming out of the MOD yesterday stating that torture, genocide and crimes against humanity would join sexual offences in being excluded from the Bill. I recognise that the Government disagree with Lords amendment 1 and have tabled a suite of amendments in lieu. The Government's alternative is not perfect, but it is a welcome concession for several reasons, not least because last month, the Government published their long-awaited integrated review, which under a section entitled, "Our force for good agenda", states that the UK will ensure that the principles and values on which our legal system is built

"remain a global standard."

It would have proved difficult, if not impossible, to square the ambition of those words with the original version of the Bill. It is worth reflecting on how we arrived at this point.

The relevant offences aspect of the Bill generated near-universal opposition—not quite to the level that we have seen with the European super league over the past 48 hours, but considerable opposition none the less. The amendment passed last week was moved by someone who had served as both Secretary of State for Defence and Secretary-General of NATO, and it was supported by an impressive cohort, several of whom have lifelong ties to defence and security. The group included no fewer than six former Chiefs of the Defence Staff, who between them have contributed more than 200 years of service. Supporters also included a former Chief of the General Staff and a First Sea Lord, a former director general of MI5 and a former national security adviser. We have also seen a former Commander, Land Forces and a Judge Advocate General publicly condemn this element of the Bill, as have the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and, perhaps most concerning, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, who warned that cases involving British troops might have been brought before the ICC. We should pause and consider what that might have meant. This is something I have been deeply worried about, and it has been raised on numerous occasions since the Bill was published. We are a proud signatory to the Rome statute, and Ministers should never risk our troops being dragged before the ICC alongside dictators and tyrants.

I know the strength of feeling and high regard that all Members of this House have for those who serve in our armed forces and, sadly, we are all too familiar with stories of our service personnel being hounded for years. No one is denying that there is a problem, and lives have undoubtedly been ruined as a result. I have said consistently throughout the Bill's passage that we must address the deficiencies of the investigative process and provide those under investigation with our full support.

[Dan Jarvis]

To conclude, Lords amendment 1 is the international standard. The Government's counter falls short of that. For instance, torture is excluded, which is a welcome move, but mutilation and inhuman treatment are not. As a reminder, the ICC has warned that the exemption clause should extend to all crimes within the jurisdiction of the court, meaning that the possibility of British troops finding themselves before the court has not completely disappeared. While I still do not believe that the Bill will achieve its stated aim, I am pleased and relieved that concessions have been made. However, I urge Ministers to accept Lords amendment 1 in full, because we can never use deeply regrettable instances of failure to renege on our commitment to the rule of law.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. and gallant Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). It would not be right to talk about the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill without mentioning my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). While the circumstances surrounding his departure are regrettable and sad to me, I wish to commend him for his fantastic contribution, hard work and passion. I cannot think of a single Minister who has given so much of himself, worn his heart on his sleeve or driven his cause harder. We now have legislation in place in an area where previously we had none, and I want to issue to my hon. Friend a public and heartfelt thank you on behalf of all the veterans community.

I would also like to welcome the new Minister for Defence People and Veterans, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), to his place. As my friend and neighbour in Aldershot, he is perfectly placed to take on challenges ahead. He has done his time in the Whips Office, he has done his time in uniform and he is also a veteran. He is the perfect combination.

Bob Stewart: While my good friend is blowing smoke up the backside of the new, excellent Minister, I have to say that I have a real worry. In the Ministry of Defence, we are now stuck with two woodentops and one black mafia, with two officers from the Scots Guards and one from The Rifles. I am a bit worried about where the rest of us will fit in.

James Sunderland: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention; he has stolen my thunder, because I have a similar theme. As a long-standing member of the new Minister's association in Aldershot and a former commanding officer of a proud regiment in Aldershot, I will be keeping a close eye on him while supporting him as best I can. I know that Aldershot will be very proud of him.

I am a bit concerned that, as my good friend, the right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), mentioned, the MOD has not two but three infantry officers at the helm. My admiration for Jeremy Quin, the procurement Minister, goes up by the day. [Interruption.] No, he is not an infantry officer. As the veritable quartermaster for the MOD, my good friend Jeremy will, I know, keep an eye on any daring adventures and keep them in check within the MOD.

3.15 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. For the sake of good order, we refer to Members using their constituency.

James Sunderland: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point is well made and well taken.

I made it clear on Second Reading that the Bill is a good Bill. I voted it through because it was the right thing to do. My view has not changed, despite the Lords amendments that have been introduced. People would be amazed by the hysteria and shock in my inbox from people attacking the Bill from every angle. But I want to make something absolutely clear. The supposition in some quarters that British troops are predisposed to wantonly commit war crimes in operations, or that the UK has given them a green light or a get-out-of-jail-free card is absurd. The MOD already has one of the most effective and robust service justice systems in the world, and I can tell the House as someone who has served on eight operational tours that we have the best-led and best-trained soldiers in the world.

We have a great record in this area and nothing will change. That is why I am less worried about the exclusion of war crimes. The presumption against prosecution does not affect in any way the UK's ability to conduct investigations or prosecutions. It is a higher threshold, not a bar. However, in deference to those who spoke so eloquently, both on Second Reading and on Lords amendment 1, and the views of many in this place, I note that the MOD is seeking to exclude more serious crimes such as torture, genocide and crimes against humanity from the five-year rule, which I welcome.

Lords amendment 2 sets out a new process for investigations. It introduces timelines for them and gives a direct role for prosecutors in investigations. Personally, I do not like the phrase, "artificial timelines for the progress of investigations", or the power of the Judge Advocate General to intervene. Furthermore, the limitations in the amendment do not apply in civilian life to police force investigations, meaning this would create an anomaly. I am therefore comfortable with the Government's position and I urge the House to reject the amendment.

Lords amendment 3 removes from the Bill the duty to consider derogation from the convention. The Government have noted that article 15 of the European convention on human rights provides that states may temporarily suspend relevant human rights obligations. The removal of clause 12 would not prevent the Government from making a conscious decision when committing armed forces to overseas operations. I am therefore comfortable, as we maintain the capability to deploy soldiers abroad and derogate, that we are in the right place. So, again, I support the Government's position on Lords amendment 3.

Lords amendment 4 excludes action brought against the Crown by serving or former service personnel from the limitation measures introduced by part 2 of the Bill. The impact of new limitation periods on the ability of service personnel to make claims will be minimal. The longstops in part 2 have been introduced to offer greater legal certainty, as well as greater certainty to service personnel. So I agree again that the amendment should be opposed.

Amendment 5 requires the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament, within six months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent, a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations; it also requires an annual report. As someone who knows, I can tell the House that service personnel are entitled to legal support at public expense when they face criminal allegations and civil claims. Legal support is also available when people are required to give evidence at inquests, to inquiries and in litigation. In addition, the Armed Forces Bill is bringing the armed forces covenant into statute, and medical support available to all soldiers and veterans is unrivalled. And let us not forget mental health. The Government are now throwing money at this problem, and we are getting better all the time. I agree with the Government that the amendment is neither viable nor necessary.

This is a good Bill, and the Government's concessions today make it even better, but the rest of the Lords amendments, in my view, should be rejected.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP) [V]: It is, as always, a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), who serves expertly as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on veterans. It is appropriate that he has sought to recalibrate the dangerous notion that could arise from some of our considerations about the ongoing, genuine and sustained efforts that our armed forces make as they serve our country.

On behalf of my party, I congratulate the new Minister for Defence People and Veterans on his appointment. I know him well. We have served together in the Select Committee on Defence, and I know he will be a true champion for veterans. It would be inappropriate were I not to mention the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). He was elected at exactly the same time as me, I made my maiden speech immediately after he made his, and we served together on the Defence Committee. I do not think that anyone in this House would question his passion or his commitment to veterans. Yesterday was a difficult day for him, but he should take comfort from knowing that he has stood steadfast by the commitments he gave to veterans who served in Northern Ireland.

I was interested to hear the Minister, at the start of today's proceedings, indicate that the Northern Ireland Office will bring forward a Bill that offers equivalent protection for veterans who served in Northern Ireland. Last night, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View wrote that the Government are good at saying the right thing, but perhaps not so good at delivering. We need to see action. That commitment to provide for veterans from Northern Ireland was given to the House in a written ministerial statement on 18 March last year—the day that this Bill, the Overseas Operations Bill, was introduced. Thirteen months later, we are still waiting, eager and interested to see the detail. There is genuine concern. Should there be an attempt to provide equivalence between those who served our country—those honourable service personnel who stood against tyranny and terrorism—and terrorists, I hope that it will not find favour in this House.

I thank the Government for their movement in the light of Lords amendment 1. We will support the amendment, as we think that, in totality, it captures the

range of issues that were fairly outlined by the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) and the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis). It is important that we ensure there is no suggestion or no cause for concern that our armed forces personnel would be engaged in activities such as torture, crimes against humanity, or war crimes and genocide. That is where I differ from the Government. I hope that they will reflect honourably on the fears relating to war crimes in particular. Having moved on the other three issues, I ask that the Government do the same on war crimes as well.

I ask the Minister, when he sums up, to reflect again on the comments he made about Lords amendment 5. A duty of care on legal, pastoral and mental wellbeing is not something that Government should fear. I think I heard the Minister indicate that there was potential to impact upon the operational effectiveness of our armed forces should the amendment pass, but I cannot see that cause for concern. I ask him to give that renewed consideration and reflect on it in his closing remarks.

On the other Lords amendment, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8, we will support the Government. We have welcomed this Bill. We recognise the need for it. We want to see an end to vexatious prosecutions. In supporting some of the amendments and in asking the Government to go a little farther, we will keenly work with the new Minister as he embarks on his role, not only on the concluding stages of this Bill, but on honouring the commitments that he and his colleagues made, in their manifesto and to this House, on protecting veterans from Northern Ireland.

Bob Stewart: May I reiterate my congratulations to my very good friend and now my former Whip, who had a very difficult job of keeping me in order? Best of luck to the next one—bring 'em on. Well done. I am really pleased for him. I am also saddened. The one thing about my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), a good friend of mine, is that he led all the time with his heart. He was trying his very best to do the right thing for his constituents and for the armed forces. It was good, too, that he was a commander gunner, rather than a woodentop or member of the black mafia.

I have given evidence in war crimes trials and in trials that involved crimes against humanity and genocide—not torture, but those two—and I am slightly concerned that we have not put war crimes into this Bill. After all, there are plenty of war crimes that are well documented from the second world war, such as Wormhoudt, on 28 May 1940, where 80 mainly British soldiers from the 2nd battalion the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the 4th battalion the Cheshire Regiment, both regiments that have gone now, were stuck in a wooden hut and machine gunned. Grenades were then thrown in at them. This was done by the 1st SS division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler. That is a clear war crime. But, sadly, we are not immune from some criticism. In the second world war, some of our submarines did machine gun survivors in the water. Some of our soldiers did rape and kill civilians in Normandy and in Germany. And, I am afraid, the British Army was involved in similar instances in Malaya and in Kenya. I will not go further on this. I am not trying to blame anyone, but I think the crime of war crime should be in this Bill. I will be voting

[*Bob Stewart*]

for it, but I hope that the Government will think again on the subject of war crimes. Everyone is nodding because it makes sense.

My last paragraph or so is fundamentally to reinforce something that I know my friend the Minister is fully on board with. The Ministry of Defence cannot escape its responsibility to look after veterans from Northern Ireland. I know that the Minister has got that point. I also know that it is not the MOD that is in the lead on this; it is the Northern Ireland Office. I really believe that very shortly we will have some good news—I hope so. When this Bill goes through, as I have mentioned already, we will have two grades of veterans: those who are better protected in the matter we are discussing today, and those who are not. Those who are not will broadly be classified as Northern Ireland veterans, which others here can classify themselves as, too. I think I have said enough. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

3.30 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. While it is an absolute honour to follow the right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), it is also a tough gig in defence debates, but I will do my absolute best in the time that I have.

I will speak to Lords amendments 4 and 5 and the new clauses they would insert into part 2 of the Bill. Many of our witnesses in the Public Bill Committee called for this section of the Bill to be scrapped altogether. Before I turn to the amendments, I also want to add my welcome to the Minister, who is no longer in his place. He will know the frustrations felt by many of us who sat on the Public Bill Committee at his predecessor's obstinance in the face of expert evidence and personal testimonies. Like others, I sincerely hope for a change in approach, because our forces and veterans would have been better served by well considered and evidenced legislative changes, not this confused hash of a Bill. The Government have rightly identified that there is a problem and a need to provide greater legal protections to armed forces personnel and veterans serving overseas, but they have drafted legislation that makes the problem worse, all in a hurried effort to match the sweeping rhetoric of their 2019 general election campaign.

Lords amendment 4 inserts a new clause that would ensure that our armed forces retain the same rights as civilians in bringing civil claims against the Ministry of Defence. As drafted, the Bill, whose central aim we are told is to provide greater legal protections to armed forces personnel, includes provisions to do the exact opposite and disadvantage our personnel and veterans by introducing a hard six-year cut-off for any compensation claims, including for personal injury and death, all by amending the Limitation Act 1980. The Government claim that this will stop any baseless claims, yet there are already provisions in the Limitation Act to strike out any such baseless claims.

Worse still, the Bill allows the MOD to strike out not just baseless claims, but rightful ones, too. When it comes to dates of diagnosis and knowledge, such as with PTSD or hearing loss, or when it is difficult to establish facts in the context of armed conflict, claims

cannot always be made within six years. The Government's own impact assessment from last year shows that at a minimum, 19 injured or bereaved members of the forces community who made claims from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq would have been blocked from doing so had this legislation been in place. One member of our brave forces being blocked from a claim is completely out of order, never mind 19.

Crucially, we do not know what will happen in the future, but it is likely that there will be drastic unintended consequences, and we do know that with this Bill, our forces will have less protection than civilians. There is simply no justification for introducing this time limit when such a measure currently does not exist.

Unamended, this part of the Bill will only benefit the Ministry of Defence, yet the Ministry of Defence will be the defendant in all these claims. That is a clear conflict. The Government have shamefully created legislation that protects them from legitimate legal claims while preventing forces personnel from access to justice.

The new clause under Lords amendment 5 would introduce a duty of care for service personnel. I am completely at a loss as to why the Government would reject and oppose care standards for service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations. Anyone who has experience of being under prolonged or repeated investigation, especially when they are innocent, will know how utterly career-ruining, life-ruining and crushing it can be to be in that position. The defence that the Armed Forces Bill is the best place to address the issue simply does not cut it, because that legislation is not yet in place. This Bill will be soon. It is a dereliction of duty for MPs to accept glaring gaps in legislation on the promise that the issue may or may not be rectified in future legislation.

As we have heard from other Members, there remains nothing in the Bill that will solve the problem of repeated investigations. Without the Lords amendment, there is nothing in the Bill that will afford our forces and veterans a duty of care when undergoing such investigations. I would appreciate it if the Minister fully explained why the Government feel that, after our forces personnel and veterans have put themselves in harm's way for all our sakes, they do not deserve legal, pastoral or mental health support at a time of heightened stress and worry.

Finally, as I did on Report, I urge all Government Members to look beyond the rhetoric and political spin, read the legislation and consider the noble Lords' amendments and new clauses carefully, before they vote with their Whip and put our armed forces and our veterans at a gross disadvantage.

Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con): I congratulate the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) on what must have been a massive overnight essay crisis or the worst sort of Sandhurst show parade. I will be amazed if he can keep his eyes open for the next couple of minutes, but my contribution will be short.

I welcome the Government's sincere efforts, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), to deal with these vexatious legal actions. Having listened to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), it strikes me that there is now an opportunity to listen to

the bishops, the former Secretary-General of NATO, the admirals, the air marshals, the generals, the right hon. Opposition Members, the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) and a former Attorney General. We must renew our efforts in support of Northern Ireland veterans, including some soldiers with whom I served elsewhere.

More generally, on these crimes—about which, I regret to say, I very, very nearly know rather a lot—no British soldier should ever be any doubt whatever that if they commit these crimes, they will be liable for prosecution by our courts for the rest of their lives.

Jamie Stone: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway). I wish to take this opportunity—I try do this from time to time, Mr Deputy Speaker—to remind the House that one of my children is serving in the armed forces, as is my son-in-law.

I offer my personal congratulations to the new Minister, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty). We do not know each other well, but I am somewhat biased as my late brother-in-law served with the Scots Guards and I would not dream of calling them the woodentops; they are a very fine regiment indeed.

It would be churlish of me not to give credit where it is due: as so many others have said, the Government's move on Lords amendment 1 is most welcome. My party and others in all parts of the Chamber will welcome this change of heart. We feel we have been vindicated for our efforts to press the Government.

I could say many different things in this debate, but I wish to dwell on just one point—it is interesting how sometimes a speech will come into one's head as the debate proceeds. I would not describe myself as coming from a military family, but my grandfather served in the first world war, as did his four brothers, two of whom died, and my father served in the Fourteenth Army in the second world war. Although, as the right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) pointed out, bad things have been done by our soldiers, I was brought up in the belief—one to which I still hold dearly—that the British armed forces had the very highest standards and a well-deserved reputation for fairness and decency in the way that they conducted themselves. That reputation won us friends at that time and for the future and gave and gives us a position of moral strength that has served this country incredibly well for a very long time. To throw that away by not absolutely outlawing torture would have been a reprehensible backward step, especially as torture has been illegal in this country for more than 300 years.

The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) quoted Lord Stirrup, and I would like to add a quotation with reference to Lords amendment 1. Lord Stirrup said:

“Our Armed Forces personnel in general exercise incredible judgment and restraint in the most dangerous and trying circumstances, but it would be unreasonable to expect that they should be entirely free of the faults and frailties that are part of the wider society from which they spring. When such crimes are suspected, they should be investigated thoroughly—and the investigation process itself would certainly bear improvement—and, if the evidence is sufficient, the perpetrators should be prosecuted.”—*[Official Report, House of Lords, 20 January 2021; Vol. 809, c. 1199.]*

Indeed, I would argue that in more recent times, this country's agreement to and participation in the torture inquiry on the Iraq war continues to underpin this high moral position. It is as simple as this: whatever the results of the inquiry, and even in the event of an accusing finger being pointed at British personnel and action being taken accordingly, the fact is that our armed forces will be better for it, and we will still be on that moral high ground.

In the other place, my party, led by my colleague Lord Thomas of Gresford, voted for an amendment that would require the investigations process to be timely and comprehensive, to avoid repeated investigations against service personnel without compelling new evidence or information. The Government were defeated on that amendment, and that is because, as other Members have said, the drawing out of this process is incredibly bad for not just the person involved but their families.

That takes me neatly to the duty of care. Anyone involved in investigations must have access to the legal, pastoral and mental health support that they need. I am glad to see that Lords amendment 5 extends national standards of care and safeguarding to the families of those under investigation. As I said in my earlier intervention, if we do not get recruitment right for the armed forces, we are in danger of eventually having no armed forces at all. We have to staff our armed forces. If potential recruits are discouraged by what they see as their terms and conditions of employment, they will stay away. If people in the armed forces take a look at what might happen to them and the lack of support they might get, they will walk—it is as simple as that.

It is almost certain that the other place will return the Bill to us with amendments. I give credit where it is due. I think the Minister is a breath of fresh air, and I welcome him to his place. I hope that he and all the reasonable Members on both sides of the House will look at what the other place sends back to us very seriously indeed and act accordingly, because at the end of the day, it is about the good of our armed forces and the defence of the realm, and we live in an unsafe world.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP) [V]: May I take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister on his appointment and wish him well in his new role? I want to express my support for Lords amendment 5, which calls for the Secretary of State to

“establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations”.

Our servicemen and women lay their lives on the line for our freedom. Likewise, their families give so much to this nation. In return, we ought to provide them with wraparound care—legal, pastoral and mental health support—whether they are subject to investigation or not. However, in the context of the Bill, it is worth expressly stating that provision in the legislation.

I know from speaking with veterans who have served in Operation Banner in Northern Ireland that the physical, emotional and financial strain of facing investigation is significant. For many, that impact starts well before the knock on the door comes, and it lasts for months and years. Who among us in this place could cope with such a threat and withstand the stress and strain that comes with it? That is why the provisions of Lords

[Carla Lockhart]

amendment 5 are so important. It is a lonely path—an isolated place—to be facing such uncertainty. We must ensure that legal, pastoral and mental health support is provided.

3.45 pm

While I make mention of conversations I have had with veterans of Operation Banner, of course those veterans, who served with such bravery and sacrifice in Northern Ireland, remain in peril from vexatious prosecutions. This Government have not, as yet, fulfilled their commitment to afford veterans of Operation Banner the same protections afforded through this Bill to those who served overseas. That is wrong, it is inequitable and it must be addressed—not by lip service and warm words, because we have had enough of those, but by action.

I commend the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). He can rightly be termed honourable, because he has honoured his word, having said that he would not stay in position if the veterans who served in Northern Ireland were left behind. Although I welcome the Minister's remarks on Northern Ireland in his opening speech, it is becoming a trend for this Government to promise one thing—to give their word on matters relating to Northern Ireland—and then do the exact opposite. That reflects poorly on those making those pledges, on this Government and on this place.

One thousand, four hundred and forty-one soldiers lost their lives in Operation Banner. The magnitude of the threat faced by those who served and survived is clear. They need the same protections as those who served elsewhere. This is an opportunity for the Minister to make his mark—to do what is right by those who served, risked life and limb, and stood as a human shield between good and evil in Northern Ireland during Operation Banner.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab) [V]: I start by congratulating the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), on his promotion. I welcome him to his new role.

Article 8.2 of the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court defines the term “war crimes” in two ways: as “grave breaches” of the Geneva convention or “serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict”.

Under those two headings, the article provides 31 different offences. Here are just some examples:

“Attacking or bombarding, by whatever means, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings which are undefended and which are not military objectives”;

“Killing or wounding a combatant who, having laid down his arms or having no longer means of defence, has surrendered at discretion”;

“Subjecting persons who are in the power of an adverse party to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments”;

and

“Committing outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment”.

I list some of those crimes because if we accept only the Government's proposal, instead of the amendments from the other place, they will remain “relevant” offences under the Bill. I am incredibly sceptical about there being a presumption against prosecution just because a

crime was committed abroad, but it is unclear to me why anyone would support a time limit or presumption against prosecution specifically on the charge of attacking defenceless towns or killing people who have surrendered. Why rule out torture but not physical mutilation or scientific experiments on enemy combatants?

The concessions that Ministers and the MOD have made on torture, genocide and crimes against humanity are very welcome, but they do not go far enough to ensure that some of the worst crimes a person can commit are excluded. I agree with the many Members who have signalled that adopting Lord Robertson's excellent amendment, Lords amendment 1, wholesale would be the best approach to uphold our international reputation.

On the issue that Ministers say the Bill addresses—the wellbeing of veterans—it also falls well short. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) mentioned Lord Boyce's remarks, and I will reiterate them. A presumption against prosecution helps no one. The issue that needs to be dealt with is the investigation and reinvestigation of cases. The Lords amendments provide a mechanism for dealing with those reinvestigations, yet the Government are opposing them. At the same time, Ministers propose to make it harder for veterans to bring cases against the MOD and oppose any attempt to provide a duty of care to ex-service personnel involved in legal cases.

Without the Lords amendments, the Bill fails across the board and falls well short. Instead of playing politics with human rights, the Government should guarantee access to justice for all victims of war, from the victims and survivors of war crimes to those ex-service personnel failed by the MOD. That is why I will vote for the Lords amendments today.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Geraint Davies.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Diolch yn fawr, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Bill as it stands is frankly damaging to our armed forces, as it removes the protection of the law from many who have suffered injustice while serving our country, and it means war crimes may go unchallenged and that they might be dragged into the International Criminal Court.

As it stands, the Bill is bad for our international reputation and, indeed, for those who so gallantly protect our country because, unfortunately, it will stop people bringing legitimate cases of negligence, bullying and worse against the Ministry of Defence that are over six years old, while at the same time turning a blind eye to cases of war crimes and torture that are over five years old, all in the name of reducing the number of so-called vexatious cases.

In the case of Iraq, there have been 1,000 supposedly vexatious cases in the past 17 years. Of those, 330 have been settled—in other words, the Government have paid up and accepted liability. Some 414 remain ongoing—in other words, the Government have not applied for them to be struck out as being vexatious—and 217, only 217 out of 1,000, have been withdrawn or struck out. Many of them have been unmeritorious as opposed to vexatious, by which I mean they have been poorly pleaded or there have been errors of law. That is no surprise, because the Government have made savage cuts to legal aid. Many soldiers do not have law degrees

and are traumatised by the experience about which they are bringing their case. There were about 10 unmeritorious cases in 17 years, which is fewer than the number of Government cases that have been rejected in court. Perhaps the Government should put their own house in order.

Let us also remember that, at the moment, the courts will not hear cases of historic facts unless they pass the test of being equitable—in other words, that fairness requires it—so we do not need the six-year limit. What is more, claimants face substantial costs to the Ministry of Defence in cases that are found to be unmeritorious, which is a clear deterrent.

We now have a situation in which the MOD can delay evidence in the name of national security and evade prosecution for negligence or worse. A constituent came to me who had been on an exercise with the military, and he had been hooded, stripped and tortured. He ended up with post-traumatic stress disorder, alcoholism and basically a lifetime of mental health problems, and we are still trying to get compensation. Clearly his case would be ruled out by the Bill.

There is the famous case of an Army cadet who was sexually abused by her instructor, and she did not bring it up until she was an adult. Again, the six-year rule would have meant that her case was not heard. There is the case of a Territorial Army officer who was subjected to racist abuse over many years, to which his superiors turned a blind eye. That case would not have been heard under the six-year limit. The cases go on.

I have no hesitation in supporting the Lords amendments on the duty of care, on the facility for cases to be reopened by the Director of Service Prosecutions when new evidence emerges, and on the facility for members of the armed forces to bring civil claims against the Ministry of Defence.

Finally and crucially, the Bill bans the prosecution of war crimes, including murder and torture, after five years, which is appalling, especially as it can take decades to investigate some of these crimes. We all know what happened after the second world war, for instance. The Government can sit on evidence for years. In a particular case in Britain, which involved the execution of unarmed civilians by British special forces, they sat on the evidence for more than a decade. We cannot justify a blanket pardon for war crimes and torture after five years of their happening, otherwise we will end up in the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

I very much support the amendments from the Lords that try to make the Bill a bit better. In essence, though, my view is that the Bill was not necessary and that it should have been completely scrapped, which is why I voted against it in the first place. None the less, I urge Members to vote for the Lords amendments today.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Diolch yn fawr.

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab) [V]: I followed the process of this Bill through the House and, at every point, I voted against it and stood in opposition to it. The Bill has deeply worrying implications for Britain's standing worldwide and risks further eroding the rights of those living in countries where Britain has a military presence.

The Bill is completely contrary to the values that I hold dear: justice, the rule of law, human rights, peace and a total abhorrence of the inhuman treatment of fellow human beings. I am glad that these views are shared with my colleagues in the other place who voted overwhelmingly across parties in support of measures to address some of the most concerning elements of the Bill.

Although the Government made a belated U-turn yesterday on the exclusion of torture, genocide and crimes against humanity from the Bill, that has been a disappointing and partial change. The Government's amendment failed to exclude war crimes from the scope of the Bill. By choosing not to exclude from the Bill crimes identified by article 8.2 of the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court in its totality, the Government's partial amendment will leave many crimes—inhuman treatment, biological experiments, murder, mutilation and cruel treatments, to name just a few—subject to the presumption against prosecution in the Bill. That was clearly not the Lords' intention when passing Lords amendment 1. We do not send our troops abroad to commit war crimes. We must hold our armed forces to higher standards than this and be willing to prosecute any cases where their behaviour falls short of our shared values. It will be a grave mistake to fail to exclude these war crimes from the five-year limit and will send a signal that we condone crimes of this nature.

Without these Lords amendments, the Bill would effectively legislate to decriminalise war crimes committed by our armed forces. That would be a grave injustice and a moral stain on our international reputation, and would put UK service personnel at risk both in the field and of prosecution in the International Criminal Court. It is for those reasons that I will vote to support Lords amendment 1, tabled by former Defence Secretary and NATO Secretary-General, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, which excludes torture, genocide, crimes against humanity and, crucially, war crimes from the scope of the Bill.

That brings me to Lords amendment 4, which would eliminate the time limit for current or former service personnel to bring claims against the Ministry of Defence. During discussions with veterans and the Royal British Legion in Wales, they voiced a deep-seated opposition to the Government's proposal on this matter, which would weaken the key avenue for service personnel to access proper compensation by introducing an unnecessarily brief time window for them to pursue claims. This is inappropriate as some conditions can take years to manifest or be properly diagnosed, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Royal British Legion has rightly expressed grave concerns that the six-year longstop could be a breach of the armed forces covenant. The Government proposal does nothing to protect service personnel or veterans or to expand their rights, but rather serves to shield the Government from criticism. It is vital that we take steps to protect the wellbeing of soldiers and allow them to exert their rights. For these reasons, I support Lords amendment 4, which would remove any restrictions on the time limits for actions brought against the Crown by service personnel.

In a statement following my vote against the Bill on First Reading, I said that, in my view, it undermines the UK's good standing in defence of human rights and the historically leading role that we have played in the fight against international war crimes. While I welcome

[*Beth Winter*]

and support the Lords amendments and urge others to vote for them, I have not changed my view of this Bill. Serious problems remain, and while supporting the Lords amendments, I cannot support this Bill in its entirety as, in the words of Justice, it would go against “the interests of service personnel, victims and the UK’s reputation as a country governed by the rule of law.”

As my colleague Baroness Chakrabarti, who has taken a principled stand and fought tirelessly against this Bill from day one, has said, this Bill is a violation

“not just of human rights, but of the rule of law itself and that fundamental principle of equality before the law...which is supposed to be a principle that even conservatives hold.”

4 pm

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): Yesterday, the Government at last agreed to table an amendment to exclude torture, genocide and crimes against humanity from the scope of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill before us today. While I am thankful for this, the fact that such provisions were considered in the first place is outrageous, and raises a number of red flags about the Bill’s intent and its remaining contents, especially in the context of the recent chilling Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021.

It is great that the Government now agree that torture should never go unpunished—I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the tireless campaigners who have forced this U-turn on them—and I am pleased with the Government amendment to exempt genocide, torture and crimes against humanity from these new legal safeguards for British troops serving overseas. However, the Government amendment fails to exclude war crimes from the scope of the Bill, which will leave UK service personnel at risk of prosecution in the International Criminal Court.

Unless this Bill is changed, it will undermine the country’s commitment to the Geneva conventions and other international treaties by bringing in a presumption against prosecution after five years to cover torture and other war crimes. In that light, I am pleased to speak in favour of Lords amendments 1, 3 and 4, and I appeal to the humanity of Members across the House and ask them to join me in voting for them. These amendments are an absolute basic threshold for ensuring that this legislation does not damage the rights of overseas victims of crimes and of service personnel.

However, we must be clear that the Bill as a whole remains highly problematic for the UK’s adherence to domestic and international human rights norms. Unamended, it would damage the standing of the armed forces by acting contrary to established legal norms both domestic and international. By introducing a threshold that would be near impossible to meet, as claims for many serious crimes are made after five years, it would afford effective impunity for UK overseas military operations in many regards.

Indeed, the Bill signals that rather than adhering to a strict human rights framework in the rules of engagement, the UK is prepared to relax—or worse, disregard—protection from many serious crimes. It risks contravening the UK’s obligations under the European convention on human rights and other legal instruments. It would also restrict the ability of servicepeople to bring claims

for personal injury and death during the course of overseas actions. Rather than protecting and enhancing the rights of service personnel, it would weaken their key avenue for justice.

As it currently stands, this Bill could also prevent British armed forces personnel from holding the Ministry of Defence to account when it fails to equip troops properly or makes serious errors that lead to the death and injury of British forces overseas. As was raised by the Royal British Legion when it gave evidence, it may also breach the armed forces covenant. We must be absolutely clear where our troops and those leading them have breached the law. From Northern Ireland to Iraq, they must be held accountable and justice must be served. The Bill in its current form threatens to undermine this principle, while also undermining support for current and former service personnel.

I take this opportunity today to call on the Government to think again and take time to make further changes to the Bill to overhaul investigations, set up safeguards against vexatious claims that are consistent with our international obligations, hold all war crimes to the same judicial standard, and guarantee troops retain their right to compensation claims when MOD failures lead to the injury or death of our forces overseas.

Jim Shannon: It is a pleasure to be called in this debate.

First, I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the birthday of the head of our armed forces, Her Majesty the Queen. When I put on the Ulster Defence Regiment uniform in Operation Banner, it was done to serve Queen and country, and I still honour her today, on the Floor of the House. Our thoughts and prayers remain with Her Majesty and the royal family on this very, very difficult milestone day.

This issue is difficult and complex. The obligation to fulfil our duty under article 2 of the ECHR is vital. Among the chatter I have heard, there seems to be confusion between a legal investigation following appropriate procedures and an investigation that gives what the family feel to be the right result or justice. This Bill is not designed to be the answer to every death involving a member of the armed forces; it is designed to ensure that the killing was unlawful and is still able to be prosecuted. At the same time, it protects against the sustained, erroneous and vexatious prosecution of service personnel such as those who served in Iraq, Afghanistan or Northern Ireland.

As DUP spokesperson on human rights, I welcome the Government changes to the provisions regarding torture as suggested in Lords amendment 1 to clauses 6 and 7. The Government’s acceptance of this in their own proposals is welcome, as is clarification as to why war crimes have continued to be exempted. I look to the Minister for some clarity on that. I have further questions on Lords amendment 4 regarding the ability of service personnel to make a claim against Government. I have been struck by the Royal British Legion’s reasoning in the briefing sent to me. The shadow Minister mentioned this, as did many others. We are all aware of new clause 13, “Restrictions on time limits: actions brought against the Crown by service personnel”. That amends part 2 of the Bill so that it explicitly excludes actions brought against the Crown by serving or former service personnel from the limitations on courts’ discretion that the part imposes in respect of actions relating to overseas operations.

It could therefore potentially go some way to addressing the issues raised by the Royal British Legion, other external experts and members of both Houses in relation to the impact of part 2. Again, I seek clarity on this.

My next point will be of no surprise to anyone in this Chamber—equivalence of service personnel. For those who currently serve or who have served in the past, we have, as is the title of Lords amendment 5, a “duty of care to service personnel”. My hon. Friends the Members for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) and for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) both mentioned this. It is really important for those of us who have served in the armed forces and those who represent Northern Ireland in particular. It is so simple and yet so effective, and unfortunately patently untrue. There is a duty of care to service personnel, unless of course they were called to serve in Northern Ireland.

At this stage, I wish to personally thank the former Minister for Veterans and Defence People, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), for his honourable actions, his passion and his commitment in the job that he had, and also for the help that he gave some of my constituents personally. I would not want to embarrass him by saying it here in the Chamber, but he really did reach out to some of my constituents in a very, very personal way. I really appreciate that and I want to put it on record.

We have today not parallel legislation where we are working through the kinks, but nothing for those brave personnel who served in Northern Ireland. I asked the Minister earlier about the legislation in respect of protection for Northern Ireland. I do not want to embarrass him but I am going to tell him what I saw as I was sitting here just before I was called. Tracey Magee says:

“NIO source tells me there are no plans to bring forward legislation in the Queens Speech on NI veterans ‘at this stage’.”

To be fair to the Minister, who I respect greatly and have affection for, if that is the case, then we really have to address this issue. If it is not in this Queen’s Speech, then when will it be? If he does not mind, I am going to hold his feet to the fire on this one and say that we really need to have a commitment on legislative time and a timescale to work towards. I have no doubt whatsoever that he is committed to this, but we need to have the involvement of Government and the Northern Ireland Office and to see it the Queen’s Speech. We need to be reassured. If there is a legislative programme, then we need it to be confirmed today and to be told what it is. That is breaking news in the past few minutes.

No matter how the republican agenda seeks to rewrite history to make it appear that there is no difference between a terrorist whose every action is a crime, and whose causing of loss of life can only be murder, and a serving member of the armed forces who may cause loss of life while legally carrying out duties, let me be quite clear: they are not the same. Legislation needs to be in place to ensure that that is not the case.

There is much in the Bill that is right and proper, but I find it harder and harder to understand and support those who persist in belittling and traducing the Unionist people of Northern Ireland. The passing of the Bill will not be complete, and will not have the full assurance and confidence of everyone in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, unless those

who served in Northern Ireland have very same rights—every soldier who served, every family who grieved. Across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, every MP no doubt has in their constituency families of those who served and died as a result of their service in Northern Ireland. For them, for the MPs in Northern Ireland, for my party and for the people of the Province, we want to be assured that legislative change will come in the House from this Government and that it will be forthcoming soonest. We want to hear about it right away.

Mr Kevan Jones: The Bill aims to address issues that rightly need to be addressed on potential vexatious investigations and litigations, but was the Bill needed? No, it was not needed. All those issues could have been addressed in the Armed Forces Bill, which is currently going through the House. The Bill was brought forward, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) said, as a clear piece of election gimmicking and as part of the worst aspects of what we have seen from the present Conservative party trying to get culture wars going.

We saw that on Second Reading in the wind-up from the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). Somehow, to criticise the Bill in any way meant that you were in favour of ambulance-chasing lawyers and against our brave servicemen and service-women. I take great exception to that. In June, I will have been in the House for 20 years. I think most people know that I have a long record in this House, like other Labour Members, of speaking up and arguing for members of our armed forces. It is worth reminding the House that many of the people who would be affected by the Bill are from northern constituencies—Liverpool and everywhere else. They are proud members of the armed forces and they need protection. The Bill is fundamentally dishonest, because it does not do what it claims to do.

Members have congratulated the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View today. Let me put this on the record. I have had my disagreements with him, but I do not for one minute question his integrity or passion in trying to get everything right for members of the armed forces. However, I have to say that the way he took this Bill and the Armed Forces Bill through was his way or no way. He was not prepared at all to countenance any view that was different from his, even when, on many occasions, it was completely wrong against the evidence we took.

Likewise, I understand what has been said about the hon. Gentleman’s campaign in Northern Ireland. It is one that I sympathise with, but he now tries to portray himself as a great champion of Northern Ireland veterans. He said last night, “Politics does this”. Well, I say to him, “Wake up. You are a politician. You were in a position to do something about it and you didn’t.” Not only did he stop the Armed Forces Bill taking written evidence from Northern Ireland veterans, but he voted against my amendment to look at Northern Ireland veterans in the Armed Forces Bill. So I shall take no lessons from him on that.

The key problem with the Bill is this: if we want to stop vexatious investigations and litigation the way to go about it is to address investigations, but the Bill is silent on that. In Committee I tabled new clauses 6, 7 and 8, which would have addressed investigations. The

[Mr Kevan Jones]

hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View told me that investigations would be not be considered in this Bill but that they would be included in the Armed Forces Bill. Lo and behold, when I was on the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, I found that investigations were not included because they are now part of the long-term review. That is a gaping hole in this Bill. That is why I welcome Lords amendment 2.

4.15 pm

We took a lot of evidence in Committee, including from Jeff Blackett, the former Judge Advocate General, whom I know well. He said that

the fact that there is a presumption against prosecution would not stop the knock on the door and the investigation. That is the whole point. The presumption against prosecution does not stop the investigation”—[*Official Report, Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Public Bill Committee*, 8 October 2020; c. 127, Q275.]

If the Bill goes through unamended, it will not stop those investigations.

The Lords have proposed a sensible way forward. I would have preferred the new clauses I tabled, which provided for case management, whereby investigations that were not going anywhere would be thrown out. The hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) claimed that that would mean treating members of the armed forces differently from the way people are treated under common law. It would not mean that because the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 does exactly the same for minor offences. If investigations are not done within six months, they get thrown out. Such an amendment would give judicial oversight of the investigation process. That is a big hole in the Bill.

If we do not accept Lords amendment 2, the hole will remain. It is not the Minister's fault—he has just come into the post. He said earlier that we do not know when the review on investigations will report. When it does, we will doubtless have to bring legislation back to make the amendments. Yet everyone knows what the problem is, so we should act now and amend the Bill. If the Government are not happy with the Lords amendment, they should come forward with something that improves the Bill. I tried at length in Committee to do that, but again, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View was right about everything and everyone else was wrong. He would not accept any amendments or even discussion of the issues.

The other contention is that the Bill will protect members of our armed forces from prosecution. It will not, and I commend Lords amendment 1. If a member of the armed forces commits a crime, should they be tried? Yes, they should, but it should be done in this country. I do not want members of the armed forces to be taken before the International Criminal Court. If we do not include war crimes in the Bill, that is exactly what will happen. Earlier, I raised the case of Marine A, in which an individual shot an unarmed, dying member of the Afghan Taliban. He was tried in a military court and found guilty. On appeal, evidence was rightly given about his mental state and the sentence was reduced. That was a war crime in my opinion, and if that case had taken over five years, the individual would have

gone off to the ICC and I do not think he would have got the justice and fairness that he rightly got from the British system.

Unless we change the Bill, it will lead to British servicemen and women finding themselves before the ICC. Telling members of our armed forces that somehow the Bill will protect them when it clearly will not is just being dishonest with them. I welcome the movement from the Government, but we have to include war crimes and have a clear indication that British servicemen and women will not end up in the ICC. That is not because we want to protect ambulance-chasing lawyers but because we want to protect members of our armed forces, many of whom come from my constituency and many others represented by Members across the House.

I never got an explanation in Committee of part 2 and the covenant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson) said—and the Royal British Legion is quite clear on this—this is a breach of the covenant. We are creating a situation in which members of the armed forces will not have the rights that we all have under the Limitation Act, so I support the change that has been brought forward. As I said in an intervention, my fear is that if the Bill goes through unamended, this will get changed in court anyway. People will challenge it, so all we will do is end up paying a lot of expensive lawyers to deal with the challenges. It cannot be right that we treat members of our armed forces—people who have served their country—in this way.

I come back to the debate on Second Reading. Those of us who raised objections to the Bill, or, in some cases, voted against it were deemed to be against members of our armed forces. I am sorry, but I am not sure that the idea of this Bill giving fewer rights to veterans than ordinary members of the public have is standing up for veterans. It might be that many individuals on the Government Benches have not read the Bill in detail. I have to say, that I have heard some nonsense from Opposition Members on some aspects of the Bill, and I do not agree with that either. However, if the Bill is to go further, it can be improved very simply. Stick the issue around investigations in and adapt the provisions so that war crimes are covered. Adopt either this amendment or bring back another amendment on excluding veterans, in terms of part 2. At least we would then have a bit of legislation that does what it says on the tin, rather than just the various claims that have been made.

Finally, I am passionate about the issue of Northern Ireland veterans, as is the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and it does need addressing. Again, we were promised it in the Armed Forces Bill. I attempted during that Bill to at least take evidence from Northern Ireland veterans about the issues, and the Government voted against it. I even tried to do a clever thing that I do sometimes and asked, “Well, could we have written evidence?” The Government were not even having that, including the great champion for Northern Ireland veterans, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who said, “No, we're not having that. We're not having any discussions at all.” In Committee, I moved an amendment asking the Government to do not just a report on the issues that affect Northern Ireland veterans, but a wider piece around mental health and other issues affecting them. Again, that was voted down and vociferously opposed by the hon. Member

for Plymouth, Moor View, so I will take no lessons from him about standing up for Northern Ireland veterans. However, as I have said, this issue does need to be addressed. The worst thing we can do in politics—I have seen this over the years—is promise things that we are not going to deliver. As the hon. Member for Strangford just said, if there is no Bill on this issue in the Queen's Speech, a lot of Northern Ireland veterans will say, "When is it going to come?" It is just dishonest if something is promised to people that will not then be delivered, so I urge the Government to consider that point.

I urge colleagues to support the amendments. I urge the Minister to look at investigations, even at this late stage, to see whether we can get that in if the Bill comes back during ping-pong. That would improve the Bill. I just wish the current Minister had been there during consideration of this Bill and the Armed Forces Bill because I think we would have had a more fruitful consideration of amendments, and real change. I just say to Government Members—the Minister knows this, because I know him well—that there are Opposition Members who want to stand up for our armed forces and help members of our armed forces. Just because we are in a different political party does not necessarily mean that we are against everything that is being put forward. I know that the Minister will work in a cross-party way because he has a record of doing that. I finish by wishing him well and I look forward to some constructive engagement with him as Veterans Minister, because, at the end of the day, I think there is pretty good consensus across the House on the fact that we want to do the best for members of our armed forces and veterans.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I welcome the new Minister to his post.

Leo Docherty: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank colleagues from across the House this afternoon for their considered contributions. I have listened with humility and interest, and I deeply appreciate the constructive tone from the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), and colleagues on both sides of the House.

A number of colleagues expressed concern about the list of excluded crimes, including the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright), the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Adam Holloway), the hon. Members for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) and for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), and the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones).

Let me make it clear that the presumption against prosecution created by part 1 does not prevent investigations or prosecutions for any category of crimes. It creates a higher threshold for prosecution, not a bar. It therefore does not prevent the UK from investigating crimes of any nature, whether they are in or out of the list of excluded offences in schedule 1. I have listened with sympathy to the concerns of many hon. Members that

failing to expand the list of excluded offences makes UK service personnel more likely to face prosecution by the International Criminal Court, but it does not. Cases are only admissible to the ICC when a state is unwilling or unable to investigate or prosecute, so the presumption against prosecution created in part 1 does not prevent investigation, and cases can still be prosecuted. We will therefore not be considered by the ICC to be unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute war crimes.

Several Members expressed concern about the duty of care, including the hon. Members for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), and for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart). The Ministry of Defence takes very seriously its duty of care for service personnel and veterans, for whom there already exists a comprehensive range of legal, pastoral, welfare and mental health support, details of which can be found, as I have mentioned, in the Secretary of State's written ministerial statement of 13 April. The Lords amendment carries a risk of unintended consequences, including a possible increase in litigation, which would be contrary to the Bill's objectives. I can reassure the House that the MOD and the Office of Veterans' Affairs work closely across all Government Departments and the devolved Administrations, and with charities, to ensure that the welfare needs of our service personnel and veterans are met. We have come a long way on the welfare provisions for veterans and our service personnel, but we will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that we get this absolutely right.

This is without the scope of the Bill, but I feel obliged to reiterate my earlier comments about our approach to Northern Ireland veterans. In response to inquiries from the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Upper Bann, my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and others, I can confirm that I expect, with confidence, legislation very soon from the Northern Ireland Office, and I look forward to keeping hon. Members updated in that regard.

I hope that I have been able to provide additional clarity and reassurance on the many issues that have been covered this afternoon. I hope that the House will agree to the Government amendments in lieu of Lords amendment 1, and disagree to Lords amendment 2, 4 and 5. I hope that the whole House agrees that the Bill will deliver an important step forward in the commitment of the Prime Minister and the Government to give our finest defence asset—our people—and our veteran community the protection they so richly deserve. I commend it to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am expecting Divisions—more than one. I remind everybody that there will be eight minutes for the first Division and five minutes for each Division subsequently.

Lords amendment 1 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (o) made in lieu of Lords amendment 1.

After Clause 7

INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGATIONS RELATED TO OVERSEAS OPERATIONS

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 2.—(Leo Docherty.)

The House divided: Ayes 365, Noes 258.

Division No. 269]

[4.30 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, 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
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
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan

Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
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

Girvan, Paul
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
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cheryl
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrisey, Joy
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Pateron, 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, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, 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
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Scott Mann and
David Rutley

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 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
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben

Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy

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

Osamor, Kate	Starmer, rh Keir
Osborne, Kate	Stephens, Chris
Oswald, Kirsten	Stevens, Jo
Owatemi, Taiwo	Stone, Jamie
Owen, Sarah	Streeting, Wes
Peacock, Stephanie	Sultana, Zarah
Pennycook, Matthew	Tarry, Sam
Perkins, Mr Toby	Thewliss, Alison
Phillips, Jess	Thomas, Gareth
Phillipson, Bridget	Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Pollard, Luke	Thompson, Owen
Powell, Lucy	Thomson, Richard
Qureshi, Yasmin	Thornberry, rh Emily
Rayner, rh Angela	Timms, rh Stephen
Reed, Steve	Trickett, Jon
Rees, Christina	Turner, Karl
Reeves, Ellie	Twigg, Derek
Reeves, Rachel	Twist, Liz
Reynolds, Jonathan	Vaz, rh Valerie
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Webbe, Claudia
Rimmer, Ms Marie	West, Catherine
Rodda, Matt	Western, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Saville Roberts, rh Liz	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Shah, Naz	Whitley, Mick
Sharma, Mr Virendra	Whittome, Nadia
Sheerman, Mr Barry	Williams, Hywel
Sheppard, Tommy	Wilson, Munira
Siddiq, Tulip	Winter, Beth
Slaughter, Andy	Wishart, Pete
Smith, Alyn	Yasin, Mohammad
Smith, Cat	Zeichner, Daniel
Smith, Nick	
Smyth, Karin	Tellers for the Noes:
Sobel, Alex	Bambos Charalambous and
Spellar, rh John	Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 2 disagreed 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.

4.40 pm

More than three hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

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

After Clause 12

RESTRICTIONS ON TIME LIMITS: ACTIONS BROUGHT AGAINST THE CROWN BY SERVICE PERSONNEL

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 4.—(Leo Docherty.)

The House divided: Ayes 357, Noes 268.

Division No. 270]

[4.41 pm

AYES

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

Atkins, Victoria	Davison, Dehenna
Bacon, Gareth	Dinenage, Caroline
Bacon, Mr Richard	Dines, Miss Sarah
Badenoch, Kemi	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Bailey, Shaun	Docherty, Leo
Baillie, Siobhan	Donelan, Michelle
Baker, Duncan	Dorries, Ms Nadine
Baker, Mr Steve	Double, Steve
Baldwin, Harriett	Dowden, rh Oliver
Barclay, rh Steve	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Baron, Mr John	Drax, Richard
Baynes, Simon	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Bell, Aaron	Duddridge, James
Benton, Scott	Duguid, David
Beresford, Sir Paul	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Berry, rh Jake	Dunne, rh Philip
Bhatti, Saqib	Eastwood, Mark
Blackman, Bob	Edwards, Ruth
Blunt, Crispin	Ellis, rh Michael
Bone, Mr Peter	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Bowie, Andrew	Eustice, rh George
Bradley, Ben	Evans, Dr Luke
Bradley, rh Karen	Evennett, rh Sir David
Brady, Sir Graham	Everitt, Ben
Braverman, rh Suella	Fabricant, Michael
Brereton, Jack	Farris, Laura
Bridgen, Andrew	Fell, Simon
Brine, Steve	Fletcher, Katherine
Bristow, Paul	Fletcher, Mark
Britcliffe, Sara	Fletcher, Nick
Brokenshire, rh James	Ford, Vicky
Browne, Anthony	Foster, Kevin
Bruce, Fiona	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Buchan, Felicity	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Buckland, rh Robert	Frazer, rh Lucy
Burghart, Alex	Freeman, George
Burns, rh Conor	Freer, Mike
Butler, Rob	Fuller, Richard
Cairns, rh Alun	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Carter, Andy	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Cartledge, James	Garnier, Mark
Cash, Sir William	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Cates, Miriam	Gibb, rh Nick
Caulfield, Maria	Gibson, Peter
Chalk, Alex	Gideon, Jo
Chishti, Rehman	Glen, John
Churchill, Jo	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Clark, rh Greg	Gove, rh Michael
Clarke, Mr Simon	Graham, Richard
Clarke, Theo	Grant, Mrs Helen
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Gray, James
Clarkson, Chris	Grayling, rh Chris
Cleverly, rh James	Green, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Green, rh Damian
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Griffith, Andrew
Colburn, Elliot	Griffiths, Kate
Collins, Damian	Grundy, James
Costa, Alberto	Gullis, Jonathan
Courts, Robert	Halfon, rh Robert
Coutinho, Claire	Hall, Luke
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Hammond, Stephen
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hancock, rh Matt
Crosbie, Virginia	Hands, rh Greg
Crouch, Tracey	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Daly, James	Harris, Rebecca
Davies, David T. C.	Harrison, Trudy
Davies, Gareth	Hart, Sally-Ann
Davies, Dr James	Hart, rh Simon
Davies, Mims	Hayes, rh Sir John
Davies, Philip	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Davis, rh Mr David	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, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen

McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 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
 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
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 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
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan

Vara, 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 Ayes:
Scott Mann and
David Rutley

NOES

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 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
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 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
 Lockhart, Carla

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
 McMahan, 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
 Osamor, Kate
 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
 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
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Zarah
 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
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Bambos Charalambous and
 Jeff Smith**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 4 disagreed 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.

DUTY OF CARE TO SERVICE PERSONNEL

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 5.—(Leo Docherty.)

The House divided: Ayes 357, Noes 266.

Division No. 271]**[4.48 pm****AYES**

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 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
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishty, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo

Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 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, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom

Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James

Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Young, Jacob
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Rutley and
Scott Mann

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint

Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furmiss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Girvan, Paul
Glindon, 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, Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran

Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Lockhart, Carla
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
Paisley, Ian
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
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, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Sultana, Zarah
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wilson, rh Sammy
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeff Smith and
Bambos Charalambous

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 5 disagreed 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.

Lords amendments 3 and 6 to 8 agreed to.

Government consequential amendment (a) made.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments 2, 4 and 5;

That Leo Docherty, Michael Tomlinson, Jack Breerton, John Healey and Carol Monaghan be members of the Committee;

That Leo Docherty be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—
(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

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

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): In order to observe social distancing, the Reasons Committee will meet in Committee Room 12.

That concludes consideration of Lords amendments to the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill. I suspend the House for three minutes.

4.58 pm

Sitting suspended.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the three Motions in the name of Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg relating to the Committee on Standards' recommendations on confidentiality in the House's standards system and sanctions in respect of the conduct of Members not later than 90 minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments to the Motions selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; these Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, at any hour; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Scott Mann.*)

House Standards System: Confidentiality and Sanctions

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Before I call the Leader of the House to move the motion, I should inform the House that I have not selected the amendment to motion 7 in the name of Andrea Leadsom.

5.1 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I beg to move motion 6,

That—

(1) this House reaffirms its commitment to the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) and to tackling bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct on the part of anyone who works for or with Parliament; reasserts the importance of confidentiality within the ICGS in order to protect the vulnerable and encourage victims to come forward; notes the concerns expressed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, as set out in the Appendix to the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards, Confidentiality in the House's standards system (HC 474), about the operation of certain aspects of the confidentiality regime set up by the House in its decisions of 19 July 2018; agrees to the recommendations specified in paragraph 22 of the Committee's Twelfth Report, Sanctions and confidentiality in the House's standards system: revised proposals (HC 1340); and notes that nothing in these recommendations undermines the key ICGS principle of confidentiality;

(2) Standing Order No. 150 is amended as follows:

in paragraph 12, line 8, to leave out "statistical" before "information" and to add "and matters under investigation" after "received".

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this we will consider the following:

Motion 7—*Sanctions in Respect of the Conduct of Members*—

That—

(1) this House notes the Seventh Report of the Committee on Standards, Sanctions in respect of the conduct of Members (HC 241) and the Committee's Twelfth Report, Sanctions and confidentiality in the House's standards system: revised proposals (HC 1340); endorses the Committee's approach to creating a revised regime of sanctions for breaches of the Code of Conduct in relation both to Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) cases and non-ICGS cases; notes that the two reports propose which sanctions will be available to be imposed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, by the Independent Expert Panel (IEP) in ICGS cases, by the Committee on Standards in non-ICGS cases, and by the House itself, with tables showing ICGS and non-ICGS sanctions as an Annex to the Twelfth Report; notes that the Committee has set out aggravating and mitigating factors in non-ICGS cases that it will keep under review, and that the IEP has published a separate set of aggravating and mitigating factors that will apply in ICGS cases; notes that the new range of sanctions includes the withdrawal of facilities or services from Members, but that, where such a sanction would interfere with the core functions of a Member, the decision on imposing it will lie with the House; notes that the Committee is currently considering options for possible appeal procedures in non-ICGS cases and intends to report to the House separately on these; and approves the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee's Seventh Report, as modified by its Twelfth Report;

(2) Standing Order No. 150 (Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards) is amended as follows:

after paragraph (4) insert –

“() The Commissioner shall have power to:

- (a) instigate informal discussions with a Member to indicate concern about the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct; and

- (b) require a Member to attend a formal meeting at which the Commissioner may indicate concern about or give words of advice on the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct.”;

(3) The Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament (HC (2017–19) 1882) is amended as follows:

in paragraph 21, at end add: “Failure to comply with a sanction imposed by the Committee or the House relating to withdrawal of services or facilities from a Member shall also be treated as a breach of the Code.”; and

(4) The Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members (HC (2017–19) 1882) is amended as follows:

(a) in Chapter 4, after paragraph 15 insert –

“() The Commissioner has the right to instigate informal discussions with a Member to indicate concern about the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct; and to require a Member to attend a formal meeting at which the Commissioner may indicate concern about or give words of advice on the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct.”

(b) in Chapter 4, paragraph 19, line 5, leave out from “may” to the end and add:

“impose the following sanctions on its own authority:

- (a) an apology in writing, or on the floor of the House by means of a point of order or a personal statement;
- (b) requiring a Member to attend training, or to repay money;
- (c) withdrawal of services and facilities from a Member, and imposing other personal restrictions including on travel, where this will not affect the core functions of a Member [footnote to be inserted here: “The core functions of a Member are defined as (a) participation in the formal proceedings of the House or its committees, and (b) their ability to communicate with and make representations on behalf of their constituents. If the Committee is in any doubt as to whether a sanction would interfere with core functions, they are expected to seek the views of the House authorities where appropriate, and to err in their decision on the side of caution, i.e. to recommend that imposition of a sanction should be decided by the House itself if there is any reasonable doubt in the matter.”];
- (d) for non-Members, subject to the approval of the Speaker, withdrawal of Parliamentary passes, either indefinitely or for a fixed period.

The Committee may recommend the following sanctions for decision by the House:

- (e) withdrawal of services and facilities from a Member, and imposing other personal restrictions including on travel, where this will affect the core functions of a Member, and where the sanction reflects the nature of the offence [footnote to be inserted here: “See previous footnote.”];
- (f) dismissal from a select committee;
- (g) suspension from the service of the House for a specified period (during which time the Member receives no salary and must withdraw from the precincts of the House);
- (h) withholding of a Member's salary or allowances even if he or she has not been suspended;
- (i) in the most serious cases, expulsion from the House.

While it is for the House itself to decide on the matters set out in the list above, its practice has been to accept the Committee's recommendations on sanctions.”

Motion 8—*Sanctions in Respect of the Conduct of Members (ICGS Cases)*—

That this House approves the following arrangements for sanctions in cases of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct by Members following an investigation under the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme:

(1) The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards shall have power to instigate informal discussions with a Member to indicate concern about the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct; to require a Member to attend a formal meeting at which the Commissioner may indicate concern about or give words of advice on the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct; and require an apology in writing, or on the floor of the House by means of a point of order or a personal statement;

(2) The Independent Expert Panel shall have power to impose the following sanctions on its own authority:

(a) requiring a Member to attend training or enter into a behaviour agreement;

(b) withdrawal of services and facilities from a Member, and imposing other personal restrictions including on travel, where this will not affect the core functions of a Member [footnote to be inserted here: “The core functions of a Member are defined as (a) participation in the formal proceedings of the House or its committees, and (b) their ability to communicate with and make representations on behalf of their constituents. If the Panel is in any doubt as to whether a sanction would interfere with core functions, they are expected to seek the views of the House authorities where appropriate, and to err in their decision on the side of caution, i.e. to recommend that imposition of a sanction should be decided by the House itself if there is any reasonable doubt in the matter.”];

(c) for non-Members, subject to the approval of the Speaker, withdrawal of Parliamentary passes, either indefinitely or for a fixed period.

The Panel may determine the following sanctions for decision by the House:

(d) withdrawal of services and facilities from a Member, and imposing other personal restrictions including on travel, where this will affect the core functions of a Member, and where the sanction reflects the nature of the offence [footnote to be inserted here: “See previous footnote.”];

(e) dismissal from a select committee;

(f) suspension from the service of the House for a specified period (during which time the Member receives no salary and must withdraw from the precincts of the House);

(g) withholding of a Member's salary or allowances even if he or she has not been suspended;

(h) in the most serious cases, expulsion from the House.

Mr Rees-Mogg: As the Leader of the House, I am happy to bring forward these motions to facilitate the House's decision on these matters following inquiries by the Standards Committee. They will implement the Standards Committee's recommendations, as set out in its sixth and seventh reports and revised by its 12th report. I am grateful to the Committee and its Chairman, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), for the collaborative way in which the motions have been brought forward and welcome the Committee's engagement ahead of finalising its recommendations. This is the latest step in our continuing efforts to improve our ways of working so that the United Kingdom Parliament becomes more effective in its core task of serving voters. Thorough culture change comes from setting expectations as much as new rules, but as the proposals do both, I hope that they will meet the House's approval.

It may help if I briefly explain the motions on the Order Paper. Motion 6 relates to the Committee's recommendations on confidentiality, which are based on proposals from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards for some fine-tuning of the confidentiality regime in relation to non-independent complaints and grievance scheme cases. In particular, the motion will give the commissioner the authority to publish a list of continuing non-ICGS investigations and to confirm or

deny whether a non-ICGS matter is being looked into, as she did prior to 19 July 2018. In addition, following my discussions with the Committee, in circumstances in which significantly incorrect information about allegations has been made public, it will now be possible for the injured party to apply to the commissioner for a public rebuttal to be issued, either by the commissioner herself or by the injured party, with her express prior approval of the text.

I understand that there has been some concern that the effect of the changes that we are making today could be to limit the ability of Members to speak to others about allegations made against them in order to seek support. I reassure right hon. and hon. Members that the position on unauthorised disclosure would of course be without prejudice to the right to access confidential advice and support from others. When it comes to ICGS cases, that right is clearly set out in the independent expert panel's recently published guidance, which says that Members may

“seek support from a family member, friend or colleague”,
with whom they may share information “in confidence.”

Motions 7 and 8 relate to the Committee's recommendations on the sanctions available in both ICGS and non-ICGS cases. The Committee has recommended a rationalised set of sanctions, as envisaged in the ICGS delivery report and supported in the reports by Dame Laura Cox and Gemma White on bullying and harassment in Parliament. Motion 7 relates to sanctions in non-ICGS cases and motion 8 relates to sanctions in ICGS cases, reflecting the role of the independent expert panel in determining sanctions in those cases.

Motion 7 asks the House to note that the Committee has set out aggravating and mitigating factors in non-ICGS cases that it will keep under review, and that the IEP has published a separate set of aggravating and mitigating factors that will apply in ICGS cases. As I said to the Committee in the Government's response to its seventh report, while these factors can provide helpful context to specific cases, they may on occasion be based on subjective judgments and will therefore be secondary to the facts established in the investigations. I think that is a key principle, and it is also important that these factors are properly communicated to Members.

The motion sets out a range of sanctions, from formal discussions at the lower end through to expulsion from the House, at the agreement of the House, as the most severe sanction. Importantly, where a sanction is to be imposed that affects the withdrawal of services, a distinction is drawn between the withdrawal of services that affect the core functions of a Member and those that do not. The withdrawal of services affecting the key functions of a Member may be implemented only with the agreement of the House itself.

I am sure that the Chairman of the Standards Committee will want to provide further details on the approach taken in his Committee's reports. For my part, I bring forward these motions as part of a shared endeavour to improve the way this House functions, and to demonstrate our firm commitment to improving our working culture further. Our constituents send us here with the full expectation that we will do all in our power to represent them properly, and every day, across the House, I find hon. and right hon. Members doing their absolute best to live up to that. But on the occasions when a Member's

conduct is found wanting, we must demonstrate the firmness of our collective commitment by ensuring, to paraphrase Plato, to every Member their due. On that basis, I commend these motions to the House.

5.7 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement and for setting out the motions so helpfully. Let me start by saying that the inquiry started, I think, in June 2019, and I encourage hon. and right hon. Members to look at the Committee's 12th report, which was published on 30 March 2021.

I am slightly concerned that the report states, at paragraph 5, that the Committee “consulted the two largest Opposition parties represented in the House about the revised proposals.”

I was first written to by the Chair of the Standards Committee on 8 March 2021. I felt that I needed to consult our business managers and senior leaders of our party, but it would have been helpful if all leaders of all parties were consulted. That would have been a much more transparent way of looking at these matters. Although the report states that we were consulted, from the evidence that was published it looks like I have had nothing to say, and that I cannot write or I cannot read, or whatever, but there is copious correspondence from the Leader of the House and the Chair of the Committee at pages 13 to 29. I hope that, in the future, the Chair of the Committee will find a way of consulting in time.

It would have been helpful, too, if the note from the Speaker setting out clarification—it appeared this morning, after hon. Members were put on the call list—had been published either the day before or well in advance, so that hon. Members could have known exactly what was being debated today.

Other than that, I thank the Leader of the House for encouraging the Chair of the Committee to engage with the Opposition, I thank him for his statement today, and I note the reports.

5.9 pm

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): May I start by welcoming this report from the Standards Committee? It definitely clears up a number of loose ends from the original work on the ICGS and demonstrates the benefits that the House has had from the past couple of years of operating the scheme. That benefit of hindsight demonstrates that the fears and suspicions of some when the scheme was first introduced have so far been unfounded. There is now a clear route to providing justice to everyone who visits or works in Parliament. At the same time, the training and sanctions in place will go a long way towards changing the culture, so that everyone who comes here is treated with dignity and respect.

There have now been two full reviews of the scheme by Alison Stanley, who in my view has done a great job. I hope that regular reviews will continue to take place to ensure that there is always scrupulous fairness, particularly in the contentious area of concern about politically-motivated complaints against MPs; I know that a number of colleagues across the House continue to be concerned about that point.

Alison Stanley has made clear in her reviews the need to speed up processes so that the findings of any investigation are delivered in a reasonable period of time. I hope that the changes made as a result will give

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

complainants greater confidence than they have today that the scheme is worth using. There is no doubt that justice delayed is justice denied, and some of the complaints that have been brought to date have been far too slow to reach a conclusion. If we do not tackle this issue, it will undermine the whole credibility of the scheme, so I urge my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and the Chair of the Standards Committee to focus on ensuring that the right resources are available to get the job done in a timely way.

I want to speak briefly about an amendment that has not been selected on the Order Paper. Mr Speaker kindly said that this would be in order as it is relevant to the main discussion this evening. In spite of being disappointed that the amendment was not selected, I will leave it at that.

When I left the job of Leader of the House in 2019, one of the key issues that was unresolved was how to ensure that MPs were not marking their own homework when it came to sanctions for the worst excesses of behaviour. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and his parliamentary team have obviously worked hard on this issue and have done a great job in establishing the independent expert panel. Members of the public will be able to have confidence that MPs are properly held to account by competent individuals who have no vested interest in the political process.

There is one piece of unfinished business, hence my amendment that was not selected—I promise that I shall not mention it again. In the past, the Recall of MPs Act 2015 was the route to the removal of an MP, whereby his or her constituents could petition for the recall of that MP and for a by-election to be held. Although this was seen by many as an inadequate sanction, it nevertheless had the advantage that the constituency concerned would continue to be represented in Parliament throughout the recall process.

The new arrangement enables the independent expert panel to expel an MP from office subject to an aye or no vote in this House. That has the clear advantage of swift justice, but it also has the disadvantage of leaving the constituents of that Member unrepresented. I am sure that all colleagues across the House can think of dozens of their own constituents who have significant problems requiring the urgent intervention of their MP, which is welcomed by the constituent in question. If an MP is expelled under the new arrangements, those constituents will have no formal representation until the by-election takes place. Although I am sure that the political parties will always attempt to provide cover, there is no agreed process or guarantee as to what these now unrepresented constituents can expect.

My efforts—I do not wish to mention the A-word again, Mr Deputy Speaker—merely sought to ensure that the Chair of the Standards Committee might hold, or indeed ask another Committee in this House to hold, an inquiry into how this circumstance could be covered to the benefit of our constituents. Although tonight's motion was the trigger for my desire to put forward that suggestion, colleagues will of course realise that any inquiry held by a Committee of this House could then also take into account either the tragic circumstances of the death of a Member, or a lengthy absence due to illness or baby leave, in considering how the constituents of that Member can be adequately represented.

I would very much appreciate full consideration being given to my suggestion. As I am sure colleagues will appreciate, I will come back to it later; if at first I don't succeed, I shall try, try and try again.

5.14 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): In all honesty, I have yet to meet a Member of this House who has not entered Parliament and politics out of completely honourable intentions. All of us want to change the world, make it a better place, improve the lot of our constituents, represent the communities in our patch and try to sort out individual issues for people as well as we can, and to tackle the injustices that beset humanity. Of course, that does not mean that we do not disagree all the time—that is a standard part of business—but nor does it mean, I think, that any one of us denigrates the honour with which other people hold their political opinions. Nor is it to say that we are not fallible—I see you smile, Mr Deputy Speaker; you are probably thinking, “Well, you certainly aren't, Mr Bryant.” I hope people do not think I am being overly pious or returning to my former profession as a vicar when I suggest that we are all—including you, sir—flawed. Even the most statuesque of us has feet of clay—indeed, I have so many faults that I sometimes think that the only vaguely decent thing about me is that I know my failings rather well—which is why the House has a code of conduct, a behaviour code and a set of rules that apply to us all, which are constantly evolving.

On behalf of the Committee on Standards, let me say that in our current work on the review of the code of conduct, we are keen to make sure that we have a set of rules that is readily understandable by Members and by the public, and that upholds the Nolan principles, which are vital to restoring to public confidence in the way we do our business, and that we get the balance right between the fundamental principles and the specific rules, so that people are not endlessly being tripped up by what I can only call bureaucratic minutiae but getting away with much greater misdemeanours. We need to get that balance right—to make sure that there is justice for the individual Member and for the complainant, and that we do so as fairly as possible. It is from those fundamental principles, the Nolan principles, that all our attitudes and our behaviours should be drawn. The Leader of the House rightly referred to the desire, shared by everybody I believe, to change the culture in the whole parliamentary community, so that Parliament is always a place of respect and dignity, where people are able to do their job with honour.

Let me explain what the Committee wanted to achieve through our reports, which have led to the motions on the Order Paper. I thank the Leader of the House for the collaborative way in which he has approached this. I hope he does not mind when I say that it has taken a long time to get the motions on the Order Paper today. I think all of us would have preferred this to have happened sooner. The independent expert panel would like to have had the powers in place a little sooner. I am not making a big thing out of it; it would just be good if sometimes we were able to proceed more quickly.

First, we wanted to maintain the strictest possible confidentiality in cases of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct that are being investigated by the commissioner and considered by the independent expert

panel, so as to protect both the complainant and the Member. It is important to remember that in those cases there is always a specific complainant who is, potentially, a victim, and that person has as many rights in the process—nor more rights, but as many rights—as the individual Member who is complained about.

I want to confirm for the Leader of the House that it is perfectly possible and right that, if an individual Member wishes to seek advice from another Member or, for that matter, legal counsel, of course they are entitled to do so. In some cases, that would be their Whip. Whips sometimes have a terrible reputation, but in my experience, they are largely there for the better management of the House—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] I am suddenly popular; it will not last—and often for the welfare and care of individual Members of the House, especially when they are going through difficult times.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am a member of the hon. Gentleman’s Committee, and I work with him. An issue that has arisen in discussion with Members is that the confidentiality arrangements seem to preclude Members from discussing with or seeking the help of their Whip to advise them on the complaint that has been made about them. It seems to be the understanding of many hon. and right hon. Members that they cannot even tell their Whip or seek help and support from their Whip in dealing with a complaint against them. Could he explain what he thinks the position is on that?

Chris Bryant: It is precisely as the Leader of the House adumbrated—namely, the independent expert panel has made clear that Members can seek advice from another Member if that is what they wish to do. It is on a confidential basis. Of course they should not do it so as to game the system or to lobby individual members of the Committee, because that is expressly a breach of the code of conduct, but Members are perfectly entitled, and it makes absolute sense, to go to their Whip to talk about the matter if they wish to do so. I urge colleagues not to use this as a means of lobbying the whole House to get support, because that undermines the whole system.

We wanted also to end the anomaly whereby the commissioner can neither confirm nor deny that she is investigating a particular case, even when the Member concerned has announced that he or she has referred themselves to the commissioner. That obviously brings the whole system into a degree of disrepute. I know that some colleagues were anxious about this clause, but in the vast majority of cases, this will mean that the commissioner will be able to confirm that she is not investigating a Member. Far too many hares have started running in the press without anybody being able to clarify the situation—neither the commissioner nor the Member—and that is an injustice to everybody.

Thirdly, we wanted to ensure that when something has gone wrong, the independent expert panel and the Standards Committee have more options in terms of sanctions than just a slap on the wrist or decapitation, which is basically what it has felt like for far too long. There are more effective means of enabling people to change their habits—perhaps the habits of a lifetime—or the way that they work, their attitudes or their behaviour in a way that aligns with the code of conduct and the rules. That is precisely what the suite of options that we

have laid out in our reports do for both ICGS cases, for the independent expert panel to use, and for non-ICGS cases, for the Standards Committee to use. The Leader of the House is right to say that anything that affects the core functions of an MP would only be decided on by the House in the end. The final vote, as it were, would be for the House.

We wanted also to be absolutely clear with Members and the public what we consider to be mitigating or aggravating factors in considering a particular case when the commissioner has brought a report to us. This seems to us a simple matter of natural justice. It is exactly the same as the courts, which have mitigating and aggravating factors when sentencing. For instance, perhaps it is obvious that a Member who committed the same breach of the rules on more than one occasion or who did so after already having been admonished by the House for a similar breach—a recidivist—would face a tougher sanction from the Committee the next time round, but we thought it important to make this clear.

Perhaps it is also obvious that a Member who made a completely inadvertent error, apologised and swiftly made recompense would be able to rely on the commissioner and the Committee to treat such a breach as on the less serious end of the spectrum. Likewise, perhaps it is obvious that a Member who refused to answer an inquiry from the commissioner or the registrar, who deliberately dragged matters out, who was rude and abusive during the process or who refused to co-operate with an investigation or inquiry would face a more serious sanction from the Committee. My honest advice to colleagues—I think every member of the Committee would say this, and it is advice I would give anyone in life—is that a heartfelt apology goes a very long way towards putting things right. I think the House and the public respect that when people are able to do it. I also urge colleagues, if they ever want advice, to go to the registrar or the commissioner because they are there to help.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I have had conversations with colleagues about the role of the commissioner, and that point needs to be underlined. A number of colleagues are wary of approaching the commissioner for advice or questioning what is going on, because they worry that this eminent person will be somehow in judgment over them or hold something over them. How should the Committee begin to break down the barriers between the commissioner and right hon. and hon. Members? That barrier obviously exists in a number of instances.

Chris Bryant: As the hon. and be-knighted Member knows—I mean that he is a knight of the realm—when we have produced our report on the code of conduct we will consult widely in the House and elsewhere. I hope that as many Members as possible will take part in that consultation process. My impression is that the rules are now far too complicated. There are bits and pieces here, there, and everywhere. It seems extraordinary that we have two pages of stationery rules in the 21st century. I think we make it too complicated for Members to do their work, and I hope Members will take part in that next process. Part of that will undoubtedly be getting to know the commissioner and the registrar better.

I will not refer to the amendment that was not selected, but I will refer to the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). Whenever

[Chris Bryant]

I see her speak, I am reminded of the fact that I lived in Northamptonshire when I was a youth officer for the diocese of Peterborough, and I used to drive up the M1. Just as people arrive in her constituency a great big sign on the motorway says, “Welcome to Northamptonshire.” Two seconds later a sign says, “Keep your Distance.” It was there long before covid. She is right to say that there is an issue for constituents who might suddenly be left high and dry. There is also an issue for constituents when there is a change of MP, because all the casework disappears into a black hole, and has to be by law. I wonder, however, whether that is a matter regarding privileges rather than standards. The Privileges Committee cannot take up issues without being expressly asked to do so by the House. If the House wanted to do that, I am sure we would rise to the challenge, and that may be the right course to take.

I do not have much more to say, but I assure the House of two things. First, the Committee takes its job extremely seriously. We seek to be as fair-minded as we can be. We set politics and partisanship aside the moment we enter the meetings, and we strive to have a system that is simple to understand and navigate. Over 20 years as an MP I have seen that the court of public opinion can be capricious, and often delivers great injustices to Members. We strive to ensure that nobody can say that of the Committee. Sir Stephen Irwin has already made absolutely clear that the independent expert panel has exactly the same determination. Having met Sir Stephen—our Committee wanted to work closely with him—I am confident that the panel will do a sterling job.

Secondly, the Officers of the House are there to help Members, not to hinder them. I know that colleagues sometimes get a bit anxious if they have to meet the Commissioner for Standards, as they think there is going to be some kind of dressing down, but that is very far from the truth. Both the Commissioner for Standards, Kathryn Stone, and the Registrar of Members’ Interests, Heather Wood, are ruthlessly impartial, and they constantly provide advice to individual Members on an entirely confidential basis. They do this every day of the week. Large numbers of Members go to see them and seek their advice, and I would urge colleagues to do so. Sometimes when we have been here a long time, we assume that we know the rules, but sometimes the rules change a little bit in the time that we have been here. It really is worthwhile, just occasionally, to pop along to see either Kathryn or Heather to get advice. Indeed, I am keen that we should end up with a system where, if a Member has sought advice from the Registrar or the Commissioner and adopted it, that would be a safe harbour for them—in other words, a system where anyone who had sought and adopted their advice would not get into trouble for it. That is not the situation at present, but that is where we would like to get to.

I would like to thank the members of the Committee: the lay members and the Members of this House who constitute the Committee. It has been a heavy workload over this last year, and I am really glad that these motions are on the table tonight. I also thank the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House, as well as the leaders of the other political parties. I am not aware that Scottish National party Members are unhappy with the consultation that we have done with them. Finally, I

would like to thank Sir Stephen Irwin and all the members of the Independent Expert Panel, who are already starting their work. After these motions have been adopted today, they will be able to do so more fully and with a greater sense of the direction of travel that we all want to go in.

5.31 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement and I thank the Chair of the Standards Committee and its members for bringing all this together for us. This is one of those unique occasions when we are in almost universal agreement across the Chamber about the direction of travel we need to take. I will be very brief in my comments.

Collaboration on any area relating to conduct is critical, and the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) was right to say that this needs to be an ongoing process. It cannot simply be what it is now; it needs to continue to evolve to take account of changing circumstances and environments. That is absolutely central to this. It is also essential that whatever process we have is fair to all: those who are complaining and those who are being complained about. It is critical that the scheme should be open and transparent, because that gives confidence to all those in this environment and to those we represent. The progress that we are making is a real positive. There is probably more that could be done as we look forward, but I have no doubt that the Committee will continue to do that and that we will continue to ensure that progress is made to ensure that the best possible standards are maintained by all Members of this House.

5.33 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the Standards Committee and its Chair, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), for the report, and I support today’s motions. We know that Parliament is on a journey to make it a good and safe place to work, and we know that this place has failed in the past and clearly must do better. The journey has been patchy in places. We know that confidence needs to be built up over time, and that we will do that by making the people involved in the process—the complainers and those complained against—feel that they are being treated fairly, that the processes are not overly long and, most importantly, that the outcomes are just.

For me, one of the most important things about the ICGS and the IEP can be found in the first letter of both: it is that they are independent. It is clear that the objectives of our behaviour code and our code of conduct can best be delivered when they are independent and when our MPs are not investigating—or, more importantly, being seen to be investigating—themselves. That is why I welcome today’s motion, which will further empower the IEP with the ability to sanction when the rules are being broken, and I am grateful to the chair of the IEP for their direct engagement with me as my party’s Whip on this issue. This is entirely the right approach. We in this House should not mark our own homework, and as a parliamentary party the Liberal Democrats have aligned our internal complaints process with the ICGS. We support the ICGS and we will utilise it, because running a duplicate process has the potential to cause confusion and delay.

The ICGS is not the be-all and end-all for making Parliament a good place to work, however. The ICGS and the IEP are there for cases where something has gone wrong. We need greater focus on preventing failures in the first place. Resources are important, and I am sure that the Leader of the House will encourage all Members on both sides of the House to take part in valuing everyone training, which was expected of new Members such as me when we came to the House in 2019. Other parties do that too. It is about improving human resources for staff, Members and Members' staff. We need to know that the right tools are in place and that people know where to access them, both when new MPs are elected—later in the spring the first new Members will join the House since 2019 following by-elections—and on an ongoing basis.

As a Whip, I see some of the fantastic work that is under way across the House continually to improve those resources, from the user services group of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker) to the work by Kim McGrath, Chris Sear and Members' HR teams. Finally, some of the steps that we can take run beyond the House. I have said before, given my background in HR, that too frequently the skills that someone needs to become a successful candidate for Parliament, an effective elected representative and an employer do not overlap. When political parties select candidates do they consider properly the fact that the person they choose will become an employer? I hope that we can all focus on that going forward. In short, there is much to be done, but I am encouraged by today's motions. Step by step, we are improving, and I hope that it is a task that everyone, whatever their party, can agree continues to be of huge importance.

5.36 pm

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I thank everyone who has participated in this debate for widespread consensus, especially the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), who has been supportive throughout and was again today? It is important that that continues on a cross-party basis, which is why I was keen to seek her wisdom as these discussions took place. I particularly want to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), who ensured that the change in culture got going properly. During her term as Leader of the House she pushed this ahead to make sure that it happened. I view my role as Leader of the House merely to carry the flabella in her honour for what she did. I would reinforce the point that she made, and which has come up again and again, that delays in the system have been one of the greatest problems. That has been tackled in a number of ways, both in ICGS and non-ICGS cases.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who has done a great deal of work on this, and has reported fully to the House. I was a bit worried when he said to Mr Deputy Speaker that none is without fault. That has a rather dangerous parliamentary history, as the hon. Gentleman will know. Peter Wentworth made that point in the late 16th century about Elizabeth I and the desire of the House of Commons, and was put in the Tower for his pains. It is dangerous territory to say that none is without fault, but the hon. Gentleman was brave enough to say it, and that lies at the heart of our efforts to improve standards, to remember that we

can all do better. His speech was extremely helpful in setting out clearly what his Committee was trying to do and the help that is available to hon. and right hon. Members to ensure that they are not tripped up. The system is not there to try and trip up people who are doing their best.

I am grateful, as always, to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson), who was right that progress has been made, and that there is more to be done. That view is shared across the House. As the hon. Member for Rhondda said, everyone who comes here wants to do the right thing when they become a Member of Parliament. I, too, have not met anyone who does not want to do that. Year after year, however, mistakes are still made. There is more to be done, but we have made progress.

The hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) raised valuing everyone training, and I can reassure her that I recently wrote to a group of Members who had not done it, to encourage them to do so, with some positive responses. By and large, people have done it—about 90% of Members have completed the training—which, again, is part of the progress that we are making. She also made the point that we need to do better, and raised the advantages of independence. We certainly see that with the Independent Expert Panel, which gives confidence to Members and complainants alike.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I apologise to the Leader of the House and to the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for missing their opening remarks. I just want to draw attention to a concern that has been raised with me about the motion to refer to the right of the commissioner to

“instigate informal discussions with a Member to indicate concern about the Member's reported attitude”.

This might seem very intrusive, but it is intended to be benign. Nobody will be judged or adjudicated on their attitude, but if we encourage the right attitudes, it is less likely that people will make mistakes and fall foul of the rules, which is why the Committee is promoting this particular method of engagement with the commissioner.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is important, I think, that the commissioner will have the ability to speak to people informally and, potentially, to stop problems arising if they can be stopped with a word in season.

Chris Bryant *indicated assent.*

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Chair of the Committee is nodding. That indicates that that is part of this. In the formalisation of the sanctions that this report is dealing with, there is also, as I understand it, the introduction of a least and lowest sanction, which is the word in season to try to ensure that things do not go any further. I made comments earlier about issues relating to how people co-operate with any inquiry, and I reiterate that that is inevitably a secondary and subjective issue, but it ties in at a later stage if somebody has done something that they ought not to have done. I commend these motions to the House.

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,

That this House reaffirms its commitment to the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) and to tackling bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct on the part of anyone who works for or with Parliament; reasserts the importance of confidentiality within the ICGS in order to protect the vulnerable and encourage victims to come forward; notes the concerns expressed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, as set out in the Appendix to the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards, Confidentiality in the House's standards system (HC 474), about the operation of certain aspects of the confidentiality regime set up by the House in its decisions of 19 July 2018; agrees to the recommendations specified in paragraph 22 of the Committee's Twelfth Report, Sanctions and confidentiality in the House's standards system: revised proposals (HC 1340); and notes that nothing in these recommendations undermines the key ICGS principle of confidentiality;

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 150 is amended as follows:

in paragraph 12, line 8, to leave out "statistical" before "information" and to add "and matters under investigation" after "received".

SANCTIONS IN RESPECT OF THE CONDUCT OF MEMBERS

Resolved,

That this House notes the Seventh Report of the Committee on Standards, Sanctions in respect of the conduct of Members (HC 241) and the Committee's Twelfth Report, Sanctions and confidentiality in the House's standards system: revised proposals (HC 1340); endorses the Committee's approach to creating a revised regime of sanctions for breaches of the Code of Conduct in relation both to Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) cases and non-ICGS cases; notes that the two reports propose which sanctions will be available to be imposed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, by the Independent Expert Panel (IEP) in ICGS cases, by the Committee on Standards in non-ICGS cases, and by the House itself, with tables showing ICGS and non-ICGS sanctions as an Annex to the Twelfth Report; notes that the Committee has set out aggravating and mitigating factors in non-ICGS cases that it will keep under review, and that the IEP has published a separate set of aggravating and mitigating factors that will apply in ICGS cases; notes that the new range of sanctions includes the withdrawal of facilities or services from Members, but that, where such a sanction would interfere with the core functions of a Member, the decision on imposing it will lie with the House; notes that the Committee is currently considering options for possible appeal procedures in non-ICGS cases and intends to report to the House separately on these; and approves the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee's Seventh Report, as modified by its Twelfth Report;

Ordered,

That

(1) Standing Order No. 150 (Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards) is amended as follows:

after paragraph (4) insert –

“() The Commissioner shall have power to:

- (a) instigate informal discussions with a Member to indicate concern about the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct; and
- (b) require a Member to attend a formal meeting at which the Commissioner may indicate concern about or give words of advice on the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct.”;

(2) The Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament (HC (2017–19) 1882) is amended as follows:

in paragraph 21, at end add: "Failure to comply with a sanction imposed by the Committee or the House relating to withdrawal of services or facilities from a Member shall also be treated as a breach of the Code."; and

(3) The Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members (HC (2017–19) 1882) is amended as follows:

- (a) in Chapter 4, after paragraph 15 insert—

“() The Commissioner has the right to instigate informal discussions with a Member to indicate concern about the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct; and to require a Member to attend a formal meeting at which the Commissioner may indicate concern about or give words of advice on the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct.”

- (b) in Chapter 4, paragraph 19, line 5, leave out from "may" to the end and add:

“impose the following sanctions on its own authority:

- (a) an apology in writing, or on the floor of the House by means of a point of order or a personal statement;
- (b) requiring a Member to attend training, or to repay money;
- (c) withdrawal of services and facilities from a Member, and imposing other personal restrictions including on travel, where this will not affect the core functions of a Member[footnote to be inserted here: "The core functions of a Member are defined as (a) participation in the formal proceedings of the House or its committees, and (b) their ability to communicate with and make representations on behalf of their constituents. If the Committee is in any doubt as to whether a sanction would interfere with core functions, they are expected to seek the views of the House authorities where appropriate, and to err in their decision on the side of caution, i.e. to recommend that imposition of a sanction should be decided by the House itself if there is any reasonable doubt in the matter."];
- (d) for non-Members, subject to the approval of the Speaker, withdrawal of Parliamentary passes, either indefinitely or for a fixed period.

The Committee may recommend the following sanctions for decision by the House:

- (e) withdrawal of services and facilities from a Member, and imposing other personal restrictions including on travel, where this will affect the core functions of a Member, and where the sanction reflects the nature of the offence[footnote to be inserted here: "See previous footnote."];
- (f) dismissal from a select committee;
- (g) suspension from the service of the House for a specified period (during which time the Member receives no salary and must withdraw from the precincts of the House);
- (h) withholding of a Member's salary or allowances even if he or she has not been suspended;
- (i) in the most serious cases, expulsion from the House.

While it is for the House itself to decide on the matters set out in the list above, its practice has been to accept the Committee's recommendations on sanctions.”—
(*Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg.*)

SANCTIONS IN RESPECT OF THE CONDUCT OF MEMBERS (ICGS CASES)

Resolved,

That this House approves the following arrangements for sanctions in cases of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct by Members following an investigation under the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme:

(1) The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards shall have power to instigate informal discussions with a Member to indicate concern about the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct; to require a Member to attend a formal meeting at which the Commissioner may indicate concern about or give words of advice on the Member's reported attitude, behaviour or conduct; and require an apology in writing, or on the floor of the House by means of a point of order or a personal statement;

(2) The Independent Expert Panel shall have power to impose the following sanctions on its own authority:

- (a) requiring a Member to attend training or enter into a behaviour agreement;
- (b) withdrawal of services and facilities from a Member, and imposing other personal restrictions including on travel, where this will not affect the core functions of a Member [footnote to be inserted here: “The core functions of a Member are defined as (a) participation in the formal proceedings of the House or its committees, and (b) their ability to communicate with and make representations on behalf of their constituents. If the Panel is in any doubt as to whether a sanction would interfere with core functions, they are expected to seek the views of the House authorities where appropriate, and to err in their decision on the side of caution, i.e. to recommend that imposition of a sanction should be decided by the House itself if there is any reasonable doubt in the matter.”];
- (c) for non-Members, subject to the approval of the Speaker, withdrawal of Parliamentary passes, either indefinitely or for a fixed period.

The Panel may determine the following sanctions for decision by the House:

- (d) withdrawal of services and facilities from a Member, and imposing other personal restrictions including on travel, where this will affect the core functions of a Member, and where the sanction reflects the nature of the offence [footnote to be inserted here: “See previous footnote.”];
- (e) dismissal from a select committee;
- (f) suspension from the service of the House for a specified period (during which time the Member receives no salary and must withdraw from the precincts of the House);
- (g) withholding of a Member’s salary or allowances even if he or she has not been suspended;
- (h) in the most serious cases, expulsion from the House.
—(*Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg*.)

Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body

5.42 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I beg to move,

That, under the provisions of Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019, Tommy Sheppard having resigned as a Parliamentary member of the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body, Kirsty Blackman be appointed to the Body in his place.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to this motion, which has been put before the House at a critical moment for the restoration and renewal project. The appointment of the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) to the Sponsor Body comes as the officials charged with delivering the works are beginning to draw up more detailed proposals, which will ultimately be put to the House for approval.

During this process, hon. Members will, if today’s motion is agreed to, be asked their views on all manner of questions — questions such as: should we put a glass roof on this or that courtyard; or, should we go above and beyond our statutory obligations; or should we spend £1.5 billion on a temporary Chamber? Sometimes it will be up to us, as Members of Parliament, to say, “No, thank you.” That is why the work of Members sitting on the Sponsor Body is so important, because the input of those directly accountable to taxpayers should make a real difference to what is eventually brought forward.

The Sponsor Body and the delivery authority will not be spending the coming months drawing up their plans to advance this project in isolation. Indeed, they have already begun engaging with Members to understand their views. This summer, Members will have the opportunity to put forward opinions on the initial work directly, with further opportunities continuing later in the year and into 2022. I strongly encourage hon. and right hon. Members to take up this opportunity. At the same time, the Sponsor Body and the delivery authority will proceed with their work, while listening carefully to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North as well as to other Members from the major parties on the Sponsor Body, who will, together, helpfully scrutinise and shape the activity. This was a task that the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) had been approaching with his customary aplomb. Indeed, I am delighted to see the third party taking such an interest in the long-term future of the Palace of Westminster, and I am glad to see that its Members are here. This is great contribution to our nation.

What is at stake here does not rest on party membership or whether one sits on the Government or the Opposition Benches; what matters is our responsibility to our constituents. We as Members are the ones who will have to look taxpayers in the eye and explain why we are spending public money on the facilities and buildings of Westminster rather than elsewhere on public services used by millions. Yes, the Palace of Westminster must be saved for future generations, but in aiming to achieve that goal we must seek to build the broadest possible consensus across the House, which means preparing a programme of works that prioritises what is vital, not gold plating. I am confident that the hon. Member for Aberdeen North will play her part, through her discussions with fellow parliamentarians, so that we can arrive at a

[Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg]

sensible outline business case that allows the programme to proceed on schedule. That is the outcome we all want to achieve, and I am sure the hon. Lady will help realise it. On that basis, I commend this motion to the House.

5.45 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for outlining the work that is going to be undertaken on the Sponsor Body, I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for all the work he has done, and I wish the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) well in her future work.

5.46 pm

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): I strongly welcome the appointment of the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) to the Sponsor Body board, and note and appreciate the work of the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). On the Sponsor Body board, we work as parliamentarians on a cross-party and both Houses basis, joining outside experts in overseeing and scrutinising the work of the Sponsor Body, which in turn is there to act on Parliament's behalf to ensure that the project is done in the public interest and, crucially, at the best value for taxpayer money. As parliamentary members, we can also act as a channel between colleagues here and the restoration and renewal programme. Of course, we are Parliament's representatives on the restoration and renewal Sponsor Body, not the Sponsor Body's representatives in Parliament.

We do not yet know exactly how long this project is going to take in total—that will come in the full plan, which will be presented to this House—but we do know it will be a substantial period of time. In recent history, MPs have averaged 13 or 14 years of service, and the average current MP has already done six. So even on a rather optimistic view of our own electoral future fortunes, most of us are not going to be here when this is finished. But it is to this generation of parliamentarians that it falls to ensure that the necessary work gets done and that we secure the future of our Parliament and the building that houses it. There has just been a strategic review of the project and the approach, and work progresses now towards the full costed plan that will come before this House in early 2023. It is important work and this is an important phase, and I am keen to welcome the hon. Member for Aberdeen North to the Sponsor Body board.

5.47 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I know that my friend and colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) will be a great asset to the Sponsor Body, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for his contributions previously. Like my colleagues in the Scottish National party, I recognise the essential nature of the renovation work being undertaken, but we are not fixing the Palace while the sun shines, so I commend all action to minimise costs and ensure that every penny is spent wisely. The oversight from my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North will be helpful in that regard, and I have no doubt that procurement will be done with greater transparency, fairness and oversight

than has perhaps characterised other more recent procurement exercises. I also look forward to seeing the restoration of trust in these processes. It is a pity that delay has led to increasing expense on the project. However, we need to make sure that every penny is accounted for. The SNP certainly will not stand in the way of any revamp. Indeed, we plan to play our part by cutting costs to the best of our ability, by vacating these premises on a permanent basis, as soon as Scotland gains our independence.

5.48 pm

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con) [V]: I am speaking in support of this motion, and I welcome the appointment of the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) to the Sponsor Body. It is important that Members of all parties are properly represented on the board, and I fully expect her to represent the House to the highest standards. It is vital that MPs sit on the board of the Sponsor Body to carry out their duties to scrutinise R and R. Although the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019 established an independent Sponsor Body to carry out the R and R project, which is an essential part of the legislation to streamline the project, it is essential that there is a mechanism to ensure that the House's views are heard. We are the guardians of the taxpayer's money, and R and R will involve vast sums of public cash. It is right that the project is completed, but it is essential that Members are in a position to scrutinise the way it is spent in line with the Act, which of course stipulates the importance of value for money. As a comparison, the cost of a new school is between £20 million and £30 million, and R and R may cost well into the billions.

As the Chancellor has made so very clear, the public finances are in a difficult state, and the Budget was a reminder of the huge efforts we need to make to ensure that the budget is balanced and our nation's books are in good health. It is only right that we find ways of economising with R and R, and that means prioritising fire safety, making sure that our No. 1 focus is on stopping the Palace succumbing to the same fate as Notre-Dame. I commend the House for the progress on the fire safety works so far, with thousands of new sprinklers and many miles of piping in between them.

It is clear that the terms of debate on R and R have moved on significantly since the Act was passed, and of course the make-up of the House has changed since then. Some of the lessons we have learned from the hybrid system can be applied to R and R, and it is right for Members to raise this with the Sponsor Body. We know that the hybrid proceedings are a poor second best, but surely they are a very important temporary option that can be used in restoration and renewal if it means saving hundreds of millions or billions of pounds in construction costs and minimising the need for a full and lengthy decant.

This appointment comes at a critical time in the R and R process. The future of the project is becoming more apparent before us, and Members must be able to engage. The programme is on track to commence the main phase of works in the mid-2020s, which is why it is so important that the broadest possible consensus is achieved across the House. I welcome the appointment of the hon. Member for Aberdeen North, and I hope that all Members agree that she will do an excellent job in holding R and R to account.

5.52 pm

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is not a great deal to say beyond what has already been said, other than to record my thanks to all those who have spoken in the debate for their support. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) and I look forward to debating the question of Scottish independence at every other possible opportunity, wheedling it in to every debate however far from the subject matter at hand it happens to be.

I am grateful for the support of the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), my shadow, and for the work of the members of the Sponsor Body, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) and my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Ian Levy), who made very important points about how they seek to carry out their role. I think my right hon. Friend's point about representing the House of Commons to the Sponsor Body rather than the Sponsor Body to the House of Commons is absolutely fundamental.

I reiterate my thanks to the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who served with great distinction. He continues to serve in this House with considerable distinction, and he was also my opposite number for a time, which he did with great charm and élan. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Carbon Monoxide: Safety, Testing and Awareness

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Michael Tomlinson.*)

5.53 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I have called for this debate today following my question in this place in February, when I asked the Government what steps they were taking to protect people from carbon monoxide poisoning at a time when so many are staying indoors during lockdown, with their windows closed and their heating switched on—prime conditions for CO poisoning to occur. Couple this with the fact that symptoms can be similar to those of covid-19, and I believe today's debate to raise awareness is relevant and necessary.

Carbon monoxide is a deadly killer. Each death from carbon monoxide poisoning is fully preventable, yet we are still seeing too many lives lost each year by this silent killer. Today, I want to consider the main risks of CO, what actions the Government should be taking, and how we can raise awareness and prevent further unnecessary deaths.

If one searches the NHS website for carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms, the list includes a tension-type headache, tiredness, confusion and nausea. It states that the symptoms of exposure to low levels of carbon monoxide poisoning can be similar to those of flu. It should also say that they are similar to many people's reports of coronavirus symptoms, yet it does not. When the Government guidance is to stay at home if you have covid symptoms and that this is the most dangerous thing you could do if you have CO poisoning, it is important that awareness is raised to highlight the distinction between the two. May I therefore ask the minister to look at that issue?

Annual gas safety checks are not as common as they should be. It is often another expense that people simply cannot afford, especially in many households over the last year where they have seen a reduction or loss of vital earnings as a result of the pandemic. There is no smell or taste to carbon monoxide gas, so without a detector there is no way of knowing whether a home or workplace has a leak, and no way of knowing if the nausea and fatigue someone is feeling is an illness or an escape of deadly gas that has the ability to kill within minutes if levels are high.

Molly Maher formed CO-Gas Safety and spent the last 35 years of her life fighting for a change in the law after fumes from a faulty gas water heater in a Tenerife apartment killed her 26-year-old son, Gary, and paralysed her 21-year-old daughter, Sheree, while the two of them were on holiday together in 1985. Molly sadly passed away last year, but the campaigning CO-Gas Safety Society continues her work to raise awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide. CO-Gas Safety strongly believes that more must be done to fully understand the scale of this issue, as well as strengthening the law to ensure that gas appliances are all tested regularly.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech on this really important issue. She highlights the education programme. Does she agree it is so important that we campaign? This is a silent killer that can affect anybody anywhere across the UK, so education is key.

Stephanie Peacock: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. That brings me on to my next point, which is highlighting how many people this issue affects across the UK. It is reported that as many as 4,000 people a year are diagnosed with low level carbon monoxide poisoning, with 200 people admitted to hospital with serious injuries and around 50 fatalities. It is virtually impossible to know how many people are affected, but a recent estimate predicts that it can affect between 3 million and 5 million people in the UK.

There are several reasons why we do not know exactly how many individuals have suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning. First, testing survivors is challenging and unreliable. Fresh air and oxygen quickly remove carbon monoxide from blood and breath, but may not dissipate it from bodily tissue which is what continues to damage a person. Secondly, the Health and Safety Executive, which is responsible for gas incidents, only investigates if there is a proven death from carbon monoxide, despite those levels staying the same until the body decomposes. This is an area that CO-Gas Safety and other campaigners have been working to change. There are around 3,500 unexplained deaths in the UK each year, yet none is automatically tested for CO despite it being a relatively straightforward procedure.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I wonder what thought my hon. Friend has given to carbon monoxide alarms. In the same way that fire alarms detect smoke, does she think there should be an obligation on anyone who has a gas appliance to install carbon monoxide alarms, for instance where they have tenants?

Stephanie Peacock: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to make that point. We need to see an increase in carbon monoxide detectors.

I would like to share with the House the sad case, in 2003, of Paul Overton, who lost his beloved stepdaughter Katie, aged 11. Paul and his wife lived in rented accommodation with Katie and their two younger daughters. Katie was cremated, but her death was treated as suspicious by the police. Ten days after Katie's death, the whole family nearly died from carbon monoxide poisoning. It was then that Paul suspected and called a pathologist to investigate further. Thankfully, some of her blood had been kept, which after testing was found to contain CO. This was later judged to be the cause of Katie's death. Paul's landlord was convicted of failure to undertake a gas safety check. It was also found that the boiler required a service after which it emitted almost no CO—it had not been serviced for years. Yet the law governing the landlord gas safety check does not make boiler service or flue gas tests mandatory. It is staggering that that straightforward change in the law has yet to be made. In 2011, Baroness Finlay, then co-chair of all-party parliamentary carbon monoxide group, recommended that all deceased bodies should be tested for CO poisoning, but no action followed.

Carbon monoxide alarms are essential for the detection of CO gases. According to the 2015 regulations, private landlords are required by law to ensure that a CO alarm is installed in any room containing a solid fuel-burning appliance, such as a coal fire or a wood-burning stove, and they must be checked at the start of each new tenancy. For homeowners, that responsibility falls to them. That is why it is essential that we highlight and raise awareness of this serious issue.

Many campaigns, such as CO-Gas Safety, led by its hard-working president, Stephanie Trotter, and the all-party parliamentary carbon monoxide group, and many survivors and victims' families have lobbied the Government for decades to raise awareness and change the law, with very limited success. It is important to note that although current law requires carbon monoxide alarms to be fitted in rooms containing a solid fuel-burning appliance, the Government's website states that

“as gas appliances can emit carbon monoxide, we would expect and encourage reputable landlords to ensure that working carbon monoxide alarms are installed in rooms with these.”

That is where the law is incredibly weak. We know that gas appliances can and sometimes do emit deadly carbon monoxide gases, but the Government choose just to “expect and encourage” landlords to install carbon monoxide alarms, instead of making that law. Such a law could save lives simply by ensuring that all rented properties are fitted with relatively inexpensive detectors and mandating that they are maintained regularly, instead of at the start of each tenancy, regardless of its length.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an important speech. I note what she said about the Government already expecting reputable landlords to do what she outlines, so does she agree that mandating and requiring them to do it through the change in the law that she suggests would not be onerous?

Stephanie Peacock: I completely agree. I hope that the Minister has heard that important point. I know that there was a Government consultation on this issue, which closed in January, but no follow-up or findings have yet been announced.

I commend the all-party parliamentary carbon monoxide group, which has worked for many years on this issue. In November 2017, it published a report on carbon monoxide alarms. After a thorough analysis, it made three recommendations. First, it recommended that the Government should update the existing Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 so that landlords are legally obliged to provide CO alarms in rooms of private rented properties that contain any fuel-burning appliance, not just solid fuel appliances. The second recommendation was that landlords should be given adequate notice of and provided with clear guidance on future changes to the regulations. The third recommendation was that in subsequent reviews and amendments of building regulations, the Government should widen the requirement to fit CO alarms to all properties, including public and social rented sector properties and owner-occupied properties.

Those asks are well within the power of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to fix. This is a safety issue and the Minister can direct Ofgem to make it mandatory for the gas emergency service to test appliances for CO and ensure that, by law, all residences are fitted with a CO alarm. Those are reasonable and simple asks, so will the Minister outline the Government's position on them?

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): This is the best speech on carbon monoxide, its dangers and the practical ways of reducing those risks that I have heard. May I suggest to the Minister that he invite Stephanie Trotter, who has been doing this work for

25 years, and representatives of the all-party group to a meeting with him, advised by the HSE, along with the National Residential Landlords Association? If the good landlords are doing what they should, the bad ones need to be encouraged. The regulations do not require registered gas engineers to test every time they have the opportunity to do so. That should be a basic requirement. It is like testing tyres during an MOT.

Stephanie Peacock: The hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly important point and I hope that the Minister will respond accordingly.

The legislation is not tough enough, and

“we need to send out the message that we will not settle for anything less than the highest standards, which are needed to protect the most vulnerable people in our society.”—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1999; Vol. 326, c. 212.]

They are not my words, but those of the former Member for Houghton and Washington, East in a debate in this place on the same subject 22 years ago. It is not acceptable that, two decades later, we are still waiting for meaningful action. I hope that today the Government have finally listened and will act.

6.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing today’s important debate on carbon monoxide and on the way she has spoken about this hugely important issue. The safety of the public is clearly a key priority for any Government, and the prevention of carbon monoxide poisoning features in the work of a number of different Government Departments and agencies. It is a multifaceted issue, which the Government recognise needs a coherent, joined-up approach, so I am pleased to be able to discuss this issue today.

While the trend for carbon monoxide poisoning is downwards, we clearly cannot be complacent, for the reasons that we have heard, whether it is the death of Katie, the death of Gary Maher or the life-changing paralysis of Sheree Maher. There was a campaign that was followed by Gary and Sheree’s mother Molly for many years. We need to make sure that we are very much on top of this issue. Twenty deaths a year by accidental carbon monoxide poisoning is 20 too many. These are human beings. We must remember them and we must act for them.

The Government and their agencies continue to take action to raise awareness about the risks. Every death caused by carbon monoxide poisoning is a tragedy, and those who survive severe carbon monoxide poisoning can feel the effects for many years, as we have heard. I formally thank the all-party parliamentary group on carbon monoxide for its tireless promotion of gas safety and its ongoing endeavours to increase awareness with Government, businesses and individuals. While carbon monoxide itself may be invisible, the importance of the issue must remain distinctly visible.

This debate gives us an opportunity to consider the importance of the topic and the levers to drive change, and it gives me an opportunity to highlight the latest steps that the Government are taking before I come back to awareness and education. It provides an opportunity to raise awareness with the public about the action they

can take to protect themselves, but it also provides an important nudge and reminder to each of us here as individuals to ensure that we are taking the appropriate actions in our own homes to protect those who we love from this silent killer.

I want to take a few moments to talk about the protections already in place and what the Government are doing to protect the public. Reflecting the cross-cutting nature of the issue, the Government have in place a cross-Whitehall group under the chairmanship of the Health and Safety Executive. That group brings together the teams, agencies and Departments that have an interest in carbon monoxide and, more importantly, that have those levers to drive up safety and awareness in relation to the relevant sources of carbon monoxide—the appliances themselves, their installation and maintenance—and that have obligations to householders and tenants.

By coincidence, the group’s most recent meeting was earlier today, during which the group discussed issues, including recent Government activity to address accidental carbon monoxide poisoning and engagement with industry to drive up safety from the design stage of appliances onwards. The group provides regular updates on activity across Government to address the risks of carbon monoxide. It publishes an annual report that is available on the HSE website.

I must also mention the important work of the all-party parliamentary carbon monoxide group, to which we have had a few references. This group provides vital discussion and promotes ways of tackling carbon monoxide poisoning in the UK. Its membership has recently increased, showing the importance that my hon. Friends and Members from all parts of the House place on this important issue.

Turning to the protections already in place, there is robust legislation in effect to ensure that gas appliances placed on the market and placed in homes are safe. The essential safety requirements for gas appliances and fittings are governed in Great Britain by regulation 2016/426, which relates to appliances burning gaseous fuels, and in Northern Ireland by regulation EU 2016/426. The law requires that these products are designed and built so as to operate safely and present no danger, including in relation to carbon monoxide. They must be accompanied by instructions for use and servicing that are intended for the user and bear appropriate warning notices. The instructions for use and servicing intended for the user must contain all the information required for safe use and must in particular draw the user’s attention to any restrictions on use.

Enforcement authorities have a range of powers to take swift and robust action where a safety issue is identified with a product. In 2018, the Government took action to provide enforcement powers to the Office for Product Safety and Standards, as well as existing enforcement authorities, to maximise the opportunity to take action where necessary, but safe design is only one element in ensuring that the risks from carbon monoxide are minimised. Boilers, cookers, heating systems and appliances should be installed and regularly serviced, as we have heard, by a reputable registered engineer. Anyone carrying out work on the installations and appliances in a home must be registered with the relevant association, such as the gas safe register for gas appliances, the heating equipment testing and approval scheme for solid fuel appliances, or with the Oil Firing Technical

[Paul Scully]

Association for oil appliances. Where the appliance requires a flue or chimney, those should be swept regularly by a qualified sweep. These actions can provide reassurance and minimise the risk of carbon monoxide in our homes, but due to the odourless, colourless nature of carbon monoxide, fitting a detector provides an effective warning that the poisonous gas may be present.

Building regulations in England require the provision of carbon monoxide alarms when solid fuel appliances are installed. When alarms are required, they should comply with the relevant British standard and be powered to operate for the working life of the alarm. The housing regulations require carbon monoxide alarms when homes that have a solid fuel appliance are privately rented. As we have heard, the Government have recently consulted on proposals to extend the building and housing regulations to require the provision of carbon monoxide alarms to oil and gas heating installations and to social housing. My colleagues at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will be publishing their report and response in due course.

There will and can be a risk of exposure to carbon monoxide in environments away from the home, where gas appliances or solid fuel appliances can be found—for example, in caravans, boats and mobile homes—so it is important that owners, whether the places are for their own use or are hired out, take appropriate action to minimise the risk of carbon monoxide to those staying in them. I reiterate that carbon monoxide alarms are a useful additional precaution, but they are not a substitute for proper installation, maintenance and the safety checks of combustion appliances.

Sir Peter Bottomley: The House will be grateful for the positive way in which the Minister is responding, although dates for when that Ministry will respond would be better. Can we remind the House that less than one part in 50 of carbon monoxide in the air can be fatal, and that alarms are not alternatives to maintenance and detection, but additional?

Paul Scully: Indeed, and the Father of the House is, in his usual wise way, right to highlight the fact that not only is this a silent killer, but that it does not take much to have a drastic effect. Clearly, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will have heard his request to chivvy along that response and his request to meet, and I will make sure that the conversations that we can usefully have with Members of the House, and there are many, come through to the right Ministry so that they can have the best effect. I will reflect on that and return to it.

Raising awareness about the dangers of carbon monoxide and the actions to be taken to minimise the risk is absolutely key and that is why this debate is so important. The Government's message is also very clear. We say to householders: use a properly trained, competent and gas safe-registered engineer to undertake work in your home and have all fuel appliances serviced on a regular basis. It is also good sense to have a carbon monoxide alarm fitted in your home as an additional precautionary measure. We say to landlords: ensure that you know the legal and moral obligations on you towards the safety of your tenants from the risk of carbon monoxide

poisoning. The hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) was absolutely right when she talked about the fact that we need to make sure that we are calling out disreputable landlords on that and that tenants need to clearly know their rights in this as well. And we say to those tenants: ensure that your landlord has undertaken the necessary steps to protect you from carbon monoxide.

The Government regularly review their messaging and information to ensure that it is clear and up to date. For example, there is a need to be vigilant in looking out for the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning at the moment during the coronavirus pandemic, as we have heard, because the symptoms of chronic CO poisoning may be confused with some of the signs commonly associated with flu-like illnesses such as covid-19. These include headaches, sickness, tiredness and shortage of breath. Similarly, one of the solutions for carbon monoxide poisoning, as the hon. Member for Barnsley East said, is fresh air, which is also shared with the covid-19 response.

Stephanie Peacock: Will the Minister respond to my point on the NHS website? Perhaps he could take it up with the Department of Health and Social Care, so that we can raise awareness of the similarities between these two illnesses.

Paul Scully: I will happily take that away and reflect on it with the Department of Health and Social Care.

We are all spending significantly longer periods at home at the moment, although it is less, thankfully, now that we are in stage 2 of the road map as we take further steps along it out of lockdown. None the less, it is hugely important that we address this. I am pleased to say that we are approaching the warmer summer months, when switching on the heating may not be so much of a consideration, but in the recent cold snap, many of us have been tempted to switch the heating back on for a few days and maybe have our windows closed to keep out the cold.

I am sure it is no coincidence that Gas Safety Week is in September and Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week is in November, when the heating comes back on and we do all we can to avoid chilly draughts, potentially reducing crucial ventilation. Indeed, Gas Safety Week celebrated its 10th anniversary last year, and Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week is coming of age this year. These provide a useful reminder and help to raise awareness at a key point in the year, giving a timely reminder to ensure that appliances are serviced and checked. That does not mean that there are not risks at other times of the year. The development of a fault in an appliance is not restricted to a certain week or month, and the risks of using certain products such as barbecues in poorly ventilated or covered areas may be more prevalent as we head into the summer.

I was struck by the experiences that we heard from the hon. Member for Barnsley East of people who have been personally affected by carbon monoxide through not just deaths but the long-term effects. Members have heard from their constituents about tragic events that have possibly even led to close calls, which are no less terrifying for those going through that terrible experience. There are actions that we should all take as individuals to reduce the risk of exposure to carbon monoxide.

Raising awareness and spreading the word through initiatives such as Gas Safety Week and Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week is also an important element of ensuring the safety of the public from the invisible threat of carbon monoxide.

The Government continue to keep this issue under close review and take steps as appropriate to increase safety and protect the public, but this is a welcome and

timely debate and a reminder to Government and to all of us that we must continue to work to reduce and eliminate these deaths and the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Question put and agreed to.

6.16 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Con)	Chris Elmore	John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson	Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Alistair Carmichael (rt. hon.) (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Ben Everitt
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Caroline Dinéage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Ben Lake
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wendy Chamberlain
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Sammy Wilson
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glindon (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	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Ben Lake	Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Heapey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore	Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson	Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Owen Thompson
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jim McMahan (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore	Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore	Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Abena Opong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson	Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Antony Higginbotham	Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Mark Harper
Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)	Mr William Wragg	Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Owen Thompson	Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew		
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore		
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Chris Elmore		

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 21 April 2021

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

CPTPP

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

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

9.25 am

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will also be suspensions between each debate. I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates here in Westminster Hall. Members are expected to remain for the entire debate. I must also remind Members participating virtually that they are visible at all times, both to each other and to those of us here in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks' email address. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room. I also remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

9.26 am

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

I am absolutely delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and delighted that the Government are seeking to accede to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership—something I proposed while I was a Minister. At the time there was very little interest from officials or from other Ministers. It is a shame we had to change the Government and then have a general election to get here, but least said, soonest mended.

I am personally invested in this accession, I am glad to say. CPTPP can provide a better standard of living for people in the UK and across the original member countries. It can deliver free trade plus self-government in this great age of interventionism. By preserving the right to regulate, it can allow democracies to function while delivering free trade—a point I hope to elaborate on before I finish. It is a high-standards agreement, as I will flesh out, and it can facilitate greater international co-operation, which those of us who are free market liberals should aim for.

I want to start by landing the central point: how important this debate is and how important the agreement could be. If we take the current members of CPTPP, and if the United States chose to return to the agreement, plus the United Kingdom, plus other potential accession countries such as Taiwan, it could result in a new platform free trade agreement for the world, covering more than half the global economy. CPTPP is therefore a major geostrategic agreement of relevance to the

whole world, so I am really delighted to be here for this debate. It is absolutely vital that the United Kingdom is there at the start.

Colleagues will know the Prime Minister's speech in Greenwich on free trade. It was an admirable articulation of the principles of free trade, and I wholeheartedly support the policy, which it is refreshing to be able to say.

I want to turn to the Government's own document, "UK applies to join huge Pacific free trade area CPTPP". It was issued when the Government formally applied. It explains:

"Joining the £9 trillion partnership will cut tariffs for UK industries including food and drink, and cars, while also creating new opportunities for modern industries like tech and services, ultimately supporting and creating high-value jobs across the UK. Unlike EU membership, joining does not require the UK to cede control over our laws, borders, or money."

That part, of course, has now run on to the rocks. As the Government explain, it has:

"Modern digital trade rules that allow data to flow freely between members".

It eliminates tariffs more quickly on UK exports than, for example, the deal that we have with Canada. The rules of origin are extremely important. I will not get into the detail, but they

"allow content from any country within CPTPP to count as 'originating'".

That is extremely important in a world of free trade areas.

The Prime Minister was very proud to support the agreement. The Secretary of State put out an excellent statement. Our accession was supported by techUK, the Federation of Small Businesses and the CBI. I was very pleased to see such a wide range of support.

The reason why I originally came across the CPTPP was that when I re-founded the European Research Group, which seems a long time ago now, it was to unite the various wings of the Conservative party—ironically—and of course, crucially, to do research. We therefore sought the best expertise from outside Parliament, and one of the documents produced was by the Legatum Institute Special Trade Commission, as it then was. It was a group of visionaries led by Shanker Singham, who is now a personal friend of mine. In April 2017, it produced "A Blueprint for UK Trade Policy", which in particular described the importance of what was then known as the TPP. It states:

"The TPP is probably the most advanced trade agreement that has been agreed by any group of countries. It is a high-standards, platform agreement that attempts to make progress on the most difficult aspects of international trade—especially behind-the-border barriers, regulatory protection, the impact of state-owned business on trade, and distortions more generally."

It goes through some of the key factors in the agreement; possibly I will come back to those in passing.

I cannot possibly go through all the detail of the agreement and I hope that hon. Members will not test my capacity to recall and interpret the text, although I did wade through the original TPP in detail. There is a very helpful explainer on the New Zealand Government website, and I very much hope that in due course our own Government will explain the agreement, but I will just cover the key features.

[Mr Steve Baker]

The agreement covers goods and market access, including for agriculture, an issue that I wish I had enough time to get into—I hope that other Members will mention it—and services’ market access, which is of course crucial for the UK. We have a comparative advantage in financial services. We should be looking to work with like-minded countries around the world not only to participate in but to define a new global standard for financial services in particular and services in general; and the CPTPP is a great basis on which to start.

The agreement makes provision for easier travel under business visas. It raises labour standards for the region. That is of course a matter of acute interest to all Members of this House. It raises them in the region; that needs to be understood. It has environmental provisions, including ensuring that there can be no waivers or derogations, for trade advantage, from any environmental standards.

The agreement protects individual nations’ right to regulate. Of course, it does not need to be elaborated on—well, perhaps it does—that in this country the idea of using political vertical integration to deliver trade policy within customs unions with harmonised regulation has, whether people like it or not, run on to the rocks of lacking democratic consent. Now, as we come together in a spirit of good will, seeking to unite, move forward and be prosperous, that is something that we need to deal with. The CPTPP is really important because it preserves that right to regulate and preserves the independence of the member countries, while delivering free trade.

There are provisions for pharmaceuticals, investment, disputes and Government procurement, because of course Governments everywhere buy a great deal. There are provisions for intellectual property, geographical indications, trade facilitation, which I will come back to later, and state-owned enterprises, at which point I will say a word about market distortions.

One key feature of Governments’ highly regulating and, indeed, spending a large proportion of GDP is the effect that they have on market economies. It is really important as we go forward, if we are seeking to promote the maximum human welfare—I hope that, despite our disagreements, everyone in the House is seeking to maximise human welfare—that we minimise unhelpful distortions. We are not trying to create the wild west here, not under this agreement and not in any reasonable future. What we are trying to do is to have pro-competitive, welfare-enhancing regulation. Of course I am in favour of doing it under an English common law tradition; there will be Members in this debate who would like to use the Scottish tradition or whichever. But the British tradition of regulation has in some ways, I think, been suppressed by our EU membership and now needs to be rediscovered. Regulation has become altogether too prescriptive. We need to rediscover people’s capacity to co-operate to deliver high quality standards within a framework that is provided by the Government but is not too prescriptive.

As an example of how things could be done better, I refer in passing to how we regulate autonomous vehicles; I remember serving on the Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill Committee. Our regulation sets out a framework of liability, but does not end up with the

Government prescribing software standards, which personally I think would be a disaster. That is just one example of how, using the common law tradition, we can provide high-standards regulation that protects the public and is conducive not only to the enhancement of welfare, but to social progress through innovation—goodness knows we will need that if we are to drive up productivity. Those are just a few thoughts on regulation.

The Government’s document on accession sets out three reasons why we would wish to accede to TPP: first, to

“secure increased trade and investment opportunities that help the UK economy...overcome the unprecedented challenge posed by coronavirus”;

secondly, to

“help us diversify our trading links and supply chains, and in doing increase our economic security”;

and thirdly to

“help us secure our future place in the world and advance our longer-term interests.”

The Government explain that

“CPTPP membership is an important part of our strategy to place the UK at the centre of a modern, progressive network of free trade agreements with dynamic economies. In doing so we aim to turn the UK into a global hub for businesses and investors wanting to trade with the rest of the world.”

That should be a really exciting prospect for everyone in the House and across the country who understands the trajectory. It will help the UK to forge a leadership position, as the Government have set out. So the Government’s strategic vision is excellent.

The agreement also leans into a really important set of current global trends. People will complain that the idealists seek to replace our EU membership, but I do not know of any credible proposition to replace EU trade with CPTPP trade—that is not a practical proposition, and I do not think that anyone is seeking to do it. I am very pleased that the Government have a high-quality agreement in place with the European Union. It is not an either/or; it is a complementary proposition. I am very pleased that the agreement that we finally struck with the European Union facilitates the accession to CPTPP.

I draw on a Bain & Company report, which is a few years old now, on the declining cost of distance. This is not about the momentary cost of containers, but about the great global trends that have taken place in our world, driving down the cost of geographical separation. The Bain paper states:

“The catalyst for this historic shift is an array of new platform technologies that have pushed the cost of distance to the tipping point. Multibillion-dollar investments in robotics, 3-D printing, delivery drones, logistics technology, autonomous vehicles and low-Earth-orbit (LEO) satellites are giving rise to new products and services that sharply erode the cost of moving people, goods and information. As these technologies combine and converge, change will accelerate...A significant change in the cost of distance would prompt millions of economic actors to rethink their strategies and investments, and cause individuals to reassess where they work, live and raise their families.”

If the coronavirus crisis has done anything on that point, it is to accelerate the trend—here we are, debating the matter in Parliament, with hon. Members about to contribute virtually. Bain was visionary in seeing the declining cost of distance as technology advances, which plays into the accession to CPTPP.

I turn briefly to two final matters. The first is geopolitics. The world can be seen now to be polarising between the Asian authoritarians—Russia and China—and the liberal maritime democracies that believe in free trade. In a speech given to Policy Exchange, the former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said that the CPTPP would go

“from being a purely regional pact to now being the beginning of an alternative global order”.

It is a huge and extremely important vision, and the UK’s acceding to the agreement will be a key part.

Let us not forget what is at stake. We see the behaviour of China and we know that the rest of the world’s nations will need to set a better example to their people than this tendency to so control the lives of ordinary people, including persecuting some of them. That is an important illustration, in the little time that remains, of how trade is strategy today, and our accession to CPTPP is about that strategy for not merely the short run but the long run, to position the UK for success and as a global leader. I do not mean “global leader” in any unhelpful way, but in a way that says, “We are your friends and partners in a very open and equal way,” to great nations such as Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, Canada, Mexico, Chile and Peru.

All that grand talk of geostrategy will not mean much to many of the small businesses in Wycombe, and across the country, which are perhaps still struggling with working out which incoterms they should use to help to facilitate their trade with the EU. That leads to a wider issue of trade facilitation, which I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will touch on. It is important that we help firms that are used to trading and exporting only within a customs union to understand that it can be relatively straightforward to export across the world. It is also important to help firms to get set up to do that. I hope that my right hon. Friend will bring his great expertise on those matters to bear through the Government, to help the firms in my constituency and across the country. There will be a huge task of simplification and explanation. The agreements are complex and their interpretation is difficult. It will be for the Government to show small firms how to take the best advantage of them.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will touch on the issue of when the Government will be able to set out their approach to formal negotiations, and that they will say more about their hopes, and what safeguards they will be looking to maintain. Perhaps there can be more about our right to continue to regulate ourselves when entering into such a large agreement. A great deal has been said about our being a small nation, but when I talk to people in Japan or, indeed, when I am inspired, Mr Brandis, the high commissioner of Australia to the United Kingdom, I find that the rest of the world does not see us as we have been encouraged to see ourselves, but as a potentially important catalyst in the new order. I should be grateful if the Minister would say something about major geopolitics, but I appreciate that that might be out of scope. However, perhaps he could emphasise how the issue is really about—I do not like to say “ordinary”—normal men and women trading in the UK, taking advantage of new arrangements around the world, the better to innovate, improve our lives, develop productivity and create a greater spirit of global co-operation around the world.

As I finish my speech, I think I should wave this great doorstop of a document that Business for Britain produced before the referendum, on the back of which is a poster, with a vision of Britain having a future with the world. The accession to CPTPP is central to that bright, hopeful future of trade and co-operation with the world, and I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Minister is here to respond to what I am sure will be an interesting debate.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate can last until 10.55. I am obliged to call the Front-Bench spokespeople no later than 10.22. That will be Drew Hendry first. The guideline limits are 10 minutes each for the Scottish National party and Labour spokesmen and the Minister; and Steve Baker will have three minutes to sum up the debate at the end. There are nine Back Benchers who seek to contribute before 10.22, and my aim is to get everyone in. If everyone is going to speak for the same length of time, Members will not want to speak for more than four and a half minutes. I know that Angus Brendan MacNeil, who is first, will want to show us how it is done within the time available.

9.43 am

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)[V]: It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. As I listened to you I was promising myself I would most definitely be finished by 10.22, but now I can see that I will have to finish four and a half minutes from now. I take on board your strictures, indeed.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on obtaining the debate, which is timely. The International Trade Committee, which I chair, is looking at the CPTPP in the international trade arena. I do not know whether there are interventions in Westminster Hall, but if anyone is willing to give it a go we can show the powers that be in the main Chamber that it can be done. I do not think that we are bold enough to do that virtually yet, but it is a possibility that I mention in passing. I will not speak for long at all, Mr Hollobone, so you can relax.

If the debate is about the economy, we have yet to see assessments being done in relation to GDP. Much is made, in prose and flowery language, of trade deals for the UK in the light of the damage of Brexit, but very little is done in numbers. Numbers inform debates that should be about business and the economy. We know that Brexit means forgoing about 4.9% of GDP—these are the Government’s own figures—yet we have had no deals to make up for this damage being done to the economy. None of the trade deals that have been signed have been new; they have all been roll-over deals. The best, probably newest-ish, deal is the Japanese deal, but of course this comprehensive economic partnership agreement has only replaced the EU’s economic partnership agreement with Japan. That will grow GDP by 0.07%, according to the Government—about a 70th of the Brexit damage that is coming—but it is actually not that because it is a replacement deal, so the GDP gain is effectively zero. That should be borne in mind.

It should also be understood what trade deals do. The best of the trade deals that the UK can get, with the United States of America, will grow GDP by about 0.2%. That is 24.5 times smaller than the Brexit damage, so we would need about 24 such trade deals to make up

[Angus Brendan MacNeil]

for that damage. Unfortunately, with the USA accounting for a quarter of the world's GDP, to get 24 of those kind of deals we would need to go and strike trade agreements on about six and a half planets populated with Americans and to which we can drive lorries. That is not really possible.

We have to understand the numbers behind this. There is no assessment of CPTPP. When an assessment is done, it should not include Japan, because a deal with Japan has already been landed; we cannot land the same fish several times. It is with a lot of other, smaller economies—Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. Excluding Japan, that deal is probably approaching the level of about half the America deal, or about 0.1% of GDP; it may be a little more. If I say that the 4.9% GDP loss of the Brexit deal is £4.90, for ease of understanding, the America deal, which is worth 0.2% of GDP, would be worth 20p, the Australian deal would be worth 2p and the New Zealand deal would be worth 1p. There are very little gains to be made. That must be understood.

Distance is an important factor as well. With Ireland, the UK imports £12.4 billion of goods and exports £17.8 billion, roughly. It has a trade surplus with Ireland. With China—I use this for illustrative purposes—we import £49 billion of goods and export £30 billion. The numbers are sort of in the same ballpark, give or take £10 billion. China is 300 times larger than Ireland, but it is further away, and distance is important, as we know. The Pacific ocean, while being greatly big, is not really that close to our doorstep. Trade for people who sell, say, shellfish on lorries to the European continent is not eased with the Pacific being so far away; it does not allow for a weekly rotation of lorries.

The hon. Member for Wycombe mentioned visas. That could be changed now by the UK Government. Many a time have I pleaded with various Immigration Ministers to allow fishermen to come to help our economy, but for reasons of headlines in tawdry newspapers, they have resisted. We have seen a loss to our economy as a result.

We need to see what CPTPP can do and which supply chains will benefit from the loss of tariffs. We must also remember that CPTPP will be similar to the new deal with the European Union. It is only free trade. As with each and every other trade deal, there will be paperwork and hassle for anybody trading under the deal. In north America, some people just pay the tariff rather than trade under a deal, because things can be so difficult.

My final words, because I am aware of your strictures, Mr Hollobone, are that we need to see the assessment of CPTPP. It is nice to have the flowery language and the prose and the good intentions and whatever in the world, but it is numbers that talk. We need the bottom line. When we have just decided to burn 4.9% of GDP and have recovered none of it in return, the numbers for CPTPP—unfortunately; I would love to be a bit more positive about this—just do not stack up very far. Given that the Government have not produced assessments of that yet, I am betting that these are in the tenths of a per cent—about a fraction of the damage of Brexit unfortunately. We must be honest and frank with ourselves. I hope I did not take too much of the time and it is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

9.50 am

Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Chairman. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for bringing this important and exciting debate. The UK has always recognised the need to get ahead of the economic curve and the accession to the CPTPP will do that on two fronts. It will be part of the ambitious push towards free trade, which I will talk about later, but also delivers on our explicit foreign policy objective of tilting towards the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific is an area that I am passionate about, and I have been delighted to serve on the Policy Exchange on this issue. It is the fastest growing region in the world, and a core amount of our maritime interests are there. It is important to our national security in defending the rules-based order and our democratic principles.

Acceding to the CPTPP will be core to free trade for multiple reasons. First, in terms of scale, it accounts for 13% of GDP. If the US joins, which is entirely possible under the Biden Administration, it will account for over a third. I come back to the point about geography, which I do not completely buy, even for physical goods, as we have seen the rise of China and how that worked with exporting to the West, but also because the future of free trade will encompass digital trade. I commend the work of the Secretary of State in this area and the amazing progress she has made in securing seven out of 11 bilateral free trade agreements with the cohorts of the CPTPP. It is important to note that it is not just the Indo-Pacific—we have countries such as Canada, Mexico, and possibly the US joining. Alongside the delivery of our tilt to the Indo-Pacific, when fully implemented, the CPTPP will eliminate 98% of tariffs. Also, one of the best things is that it will bring about a standard set of rules of origin, meaning we could integrate our supply chain with the CPTPP. One of the beneficial ways that works is that 70% of our supply chain can be accumulated in any CPTPP country to account for the preferential tariffs received.

I come back to digital free trade, something that I have written about. The UK is a services superpower—the only country that exports more services is the US. The digital economy accounts for £150 billion of the UK economy. It is growing six times faster than the rest of the economy. It is important that the UK is at the front of pushing for ambitious digital provisions. That is at the centre of the CPTPP, which makes provisions for services, intellectual property and digital trade. It was not at the forefront of EU trade, so it will be really beneficial to the UK, particularly considering the shape of our economy—80% of our economy is based in services which employ 30 million people across the nation.

The UK is making great strides in this. I think the agreement with Japan accounts for the most ambitious digital provisions in the world, particularly on data localisation that means that expensive data centres abroad are not necessary, and we can use the brilliant ones here. We all know that data will be the fuel of the future. It will fuel our incredibly rich sectors, such as artificial intelligence and FinTech, which the UK excels at, and is why the CPTPP, given its shape, its geography and its importance in our foreign policy and strategic objectives, is exactly the right thing to pursue. I commend the Government in doing so.

9.54 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you for calling me, Mr Hollobone. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. First, I thank the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for setting the scene so well and comprehensively, in a well-delivered and detailed speech. I am sometimes a wee bit in awe of his presentations because they are so well put.

The motion explains exactly what we are after: a comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. It is undoubtedly a massive debate. In 2019, UK exports of goods and services to CPTPP countries amounted to £58 billion—8.4% of the total. Imports were £53 billion, which was 7.3% of the total. Of the CPTPP countries, Australia, Canada, Japan and Singapore are the UK's largest trading partners. I am pleased that the Ministry of Defence has given more focus to the Royal Navy in that area, which goes to the point made by the hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho) about defending our national security interests and our military relationships with the likes of Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia, as well as Taiwan and Japan.

I see great potential in the deal. However, I want to explain to the Minister certain concerns that have been raised. It is clear that we must get the agreement right and that the House must be aware of every detail of the deal. In that vein, I seek assurance from the Minister that we will have not just this debate today in Westminster Hall but a full debate in the main Chamber and a meaningful vote on the UK's accession to the CPTPP, with input from every Member of the House sought in that vote. That is important. All Members should have the opportunity to feed into that. I see the benefits of the partnership, so I come to it with a positive inclination.

Distance should not be an obstacle to trade. I have a particular interest in the agrifood sector—one of the biggest businesses in my constituency—where there is incredible potential for trade to be both comprehensive and progressive. We have a special relationship with New Zealand and Australia in particular, and economic ties with Japan and Singapore. We can develop them and do more with them.

The hon. Member for Wycombe referred to the insatiable demand that China has for every mineral right in the world—every speaker who follows me will probably refer to it. They want everything for themselves, or they want to have control of it, so we need an agreement in place that can take on the Chinese, so to speak. I see the CPTPP as a method to combat China's influence politically and from a business perspective as well.

It has been suggested to me that, environmentally speaking, although CPTPP includes investor-state dispute settlements, the UK has the option of negotiating a carve-out from the investment component of the deal through side letters. There is the option pursued by New Zealand, which signed side letters with five CPTPP members to exclude compulsory ISDS. One of my biggest mailbag issues is the environment and I am keen that we do it right from an environmental point of view today, because we have it in trust for those who come after us: my children, my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren, whenever that happens—if I am still here, of course. It has been suggested that the UK

should make ISDS a red line for accession, and negotiating objectives have been published that would demonstrate the Government's seriousness about tackling climate change and guard against the other social and regulatory risks posed by ISDS. What consideration has been given to that suggestion and what is the Minister's response?

Finally, I ask the Minister to confirm that businesses in my constituency can buy into the CPTPP opportunities. We have a highly skilled, young, eager and energetic workforce, and I believe that in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, better together, we can do these things to the betterment of everyone.

9.59 am

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for bringing forward this important debate.

As the MP for a rural constituency—Ynys Môn, with its large farming community—I am keen to see the UK develop its trade partnerships across the globe, outside the constraints of the EU. The CPTPP will offer my farmers opportunities to export more British food overseas, in particular from the beef, sheep and dairy sectors, which are the mainstay of many farmers on Anglesey—for Rob and Kim Evans, Brian Bown and Trevor Lloyd.

The CPTPP offers a wealth of opportunity across the Asian, American and Australasian continents, with potentially lucrative markets for our produce: dairy products—cheeses in particular—to Canada and Australia; pork and poultry to Vietnam; beef to Japan; and mutton to Malaysia. My discussions with the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales highlight the value that is placed on the quality of British produce overseas, particularly in markets where food safety is a key consumer concern.

The UK's food is safe, traceable and audited. Our animals are well cared for and our meat and dairy produce is handled with care. My farmers see great opportunities in establishing the CPTPP. However, they also have concerns about the potential opening of the UK market to cheaper, lower quality imports from overseas. They are keen that the Government follows the commitments made at the time of the Trade Bill and the Agriculture Act 2020's passage through Parliament. We committed then to upholding our standards and not opening the floodgates to substandard products.

We need to ensure that rules of origin are considered so that large-scale imports such as milk from New Zealand do not flood our market through a back door, putting domestic producers out of work. We need to ensure that substances that are illegal in the UK on environmental grounds, such as neonicotinoids, are not permitted for use on imported products, giving foreign producers cost advantages. We need to ensure that our farmers are not disadvantaged by the economies of scale available to producers in countries such as Australia, where the cost of beef and sheep production is significantly lower due to viable herd sizes and land costs. We must make sure that animal welfare and food production standards are at least equivalent to those we enforce in the UK. That means ensuring that, for example, growth hormones are not used on imports and the animal production index is used as a benchmark of animal welfare.

[*Virginia Crosbie*]

I reiterate that our farming communities are keen to ensure that agreements such as the CPTPP are aligned with the Government's proposed campaign to raise awareness of brand Britain. We need to differentiate our produce and mark it out as different from the competition. By protecting our high standards and highlighting all that is unique and special about UK produce, we can support our farmers as they explore new markets and see our country established once again on a global stage.

10.2 am

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for bringing this debate.

I welcome the UK's accession to the CPTPP as the next step in the evolution of our post-Brexit trade policy. The agreement will strengthen the bilateral trade deals we have and our negotiation with other CPTPP members. Crucially, it will allow us to expand our increased international trade without compromising on our sovereignty. It is, above all, an economic agreement. While it requires some alignment in trading standards, as all trade deals do, it does not seek to impose political alignment. There are no common laws and where disagreements between states arise, they will be resolved by an ad hoc arbitration panel rather than permanent courts. With such a wide range of countries and economies, I do not think it could be any other way. I look forward to trading more closely with partners who understand that productive trade relationships do not require uniformity.

We will continue to have full control over our laws, money and borders, while improving access for UK goods and services around the world. Rules of origin under this agreement mean that some of our most important industries will benefit. For instance, car manufacturers in the UK can use Japanese parts; as long as the final product is 70% CPTPP-origin, it will qualify for preferential tariffs when exported to Canada. Scottish whisky, too, will see tariffs significantly reduced or eliminated, going from 165% to 0% in Malaysia.

Just as importantly, these are the economies expected to grow significantly in the coming years and decades. In just three years, between 2016 and 2019, the UK's trade with CPTPP states grew by 8% annually. Joining the CPTPP now means that our small businesses will have preferential access to these economies, and the small and medium-sized business support included in the agreement means that they will be able to take full advantage.

However, acceding to the agreement is not purely an economic choice. Among the CPTPP members are states with whom we have increasing security ties—in particular, Australia and Japan. Close economic partnerships can only help our overall relationship with strategic partners.

Finally, the Government have shown that they are open to skilled immigration from people around the world. Through the CPTPP, business people will hopefully soon benefit from a quicker, less expensive visa process. In all, the UK has a lot to gain and to offer from joining the CPTPP, and I look forward to more trade deals with a diverse range of countries in the years to come.

10.5 am

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Like others, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on securing this debate about a cause that he, as a champion of global free trade, has long been interested in. He has often thought more strategically than many of us, so I congratulate him on his prescience in pushing forward with the aim of our joining the trans-Pacific partnership.

Now is an extraordinary moment for our country. It is important that we touch on one of the elephants in the room, which my hon. Friend alluded to. The application to accede to the trans-Pacific partnership is absolutely not a substitute for leaving the European Union. It is a way of growing our trade, investment, global relationships and opportunities for constituents in ways that could never have occurred while dealing with the issue of our relationships with the European Union, and is now not just possible but the right thing to do.

Let me be clear for the record that we need our trade to succeed everywhere in the world. We do not want a huge drop in trade with the EU as a result of leaving the European Union; we want to see a significant increase all around the world. This coalition of the willing around the Pacific region, which we aspire to join, gives us a huge opportunity. As several Members mentioned, the trans-Pacific partnership is not above all about tariff benefits. In fact, we have free trade agreements with seven of the 11 members, and no doubt we will shortly have them with at least two others.

The real benefits are around that most obscure of trading details: the rules of origin. The easiest way for me to try to bring that alive, particularly for my constituents, is to highlight the challenges for a bicycle manufacturer on the edge of Gloucester, in Hardwicke, which currently imports the frames from Taiwan and adds various things from their own factory and distributes and exports the bicycles around the world. That has become very hard indeed in the European Union as a result of the new rules of origin, but should we, and Taiwan, accede to the trans-Pacific partnership, the company's global exporting prospects will be much better. Therefore, we should welcome both the opportunities from the origin and the new rules that will come from investment, intellectual property and digital trade.

As others have alluded to, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), the opportunities that come out of the Japan free trade agreement in terms of digitalisation and liberalisation set a good precedent for what can be achieved by the CPTPP, which I prefer to refer to as the trans-Pacific partnership. The advanced provisions—there may be further opportunities on services from our negotiations with Australia and New Zealand—offer greater opportunities for a nation for whom 45% of exports are services.

There is another elephant in the room: China. Let me be clear that we can and should increase our trade with China, as the integrated review spells out; given that I am a former British trade commissioner to China, no one would expect me to say anything else. I believe in increasing trade everywhere—legally, and while supporting the values we believe in and champion.

That leads me to another element of our Indo-Pacific tilt. We should not expect that it will all be plain sailing, and nor would becoming a member of the TPP in itself

prevent some of the many challenges that come about in countries where the systems, levels of corruption in some cases, amount of violence in others, will constantly challenge our own commitment to human rights. We have to find a framework for standing up for our values while making sure that our businesses have the confidence to know that they can trade in the long term.

Forty years ago, I made a decision, based on an instinct, to have the adventure of going to work for a British company in the far east. It turned out to be the best strategic thing that I have ever done, as it was for other businesses that did the same thing at that time. I am quite convinced that the decision our country is making today, on a much more rational basis, will be the right strategic move for us.

I am not sure that the description of the TPP by Stephen Harper, the former Canadian Prime Minister, as creating an “alternative global order” is necessarily where we are today. However, it is true that if the US gives the support to the TPP that was given it by the Obama Administration, that would be a significant game-changer, and our joining the TPP would turn it from a regional organisation into one with a wider global reach.

For all those reasons, I am disappointed that there are not more Opposition Members joining this debate today. This move will have benefits for our constituents across the country, and it is therefore in our interests to support the Government in acceding to the TPP.

10.10 am

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I start by thanking and congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for securing this important debate about a subject that I know has been incredibly close to his heart for a long time; the temptation for him to give the “I told you so” speech was very well avoided.

I share the enthusiasm in this Chamber for joining the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, which I think we all agree we should just call “the trans-Pacific trade agreement”. It is a huge opportunity for the UK and indeed for Milton Keynes. The agreement covers one of the world’s largest and most dynamic free trade areas. It removes tariffs on 95% of goods between members, accounting for 13% of global GDP, which will immediately rise to 15% when we join. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) said, when we join this partnership, it will not be the Pacific partnership; it will be a global partnership.

Our businesses will then have access to the most exciting and fastest-growing markets around the world—in Asia, Australasia, South America and North America. Our partners, of course, will have access to the hub of Europe—Great Britain. We are already working on bilateral agreements with Japan, Australia and New Zealand, but joining this partnership means that British businesses would go global.

I am excited about accessing these markets because they are right in Milton Keynes’s sweet spot. We have high-tech, high-skilled jobs, which will put us in the global fast lane. We are one of the most productive and innovative parts of the United Kingdom. We have

delivery robots, Formula One teams, space technology, e-scooters, driverless cars and a reality TV star building a nuclear reactor—that is definitely not worrying at all.

Milton Keynes can be the Silicon Valley of Europe. We have the people, the technology and the can-do attitude. This is my call to arms for Milton Keynes businesses—global Britain and global MK. New partnerships such as the CPTPP are huge opportunities that are there for us to seize. Plenty of support is available for MK businesses to go global. The Department for International Trade stands ready to provide assistance with customs authorities, to ensure smooth clearance of businesses’ products, and to offer advice on intellectual property and other issues, such as business continuity. Milton Keynes businesses are eligible to secure export insurance to cover markets including the EU, the US, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland—and after UK Export Finance expanded the scope of its insurance policy, such export insurance is easier to obtain.

Exports from the UK to these markets totalled £499 billion in 2019, accounting for 74% of all international sales from the UK. Joining this partnership will put the UK and Milton Keynes at the centre of a network of free trade deals with dynamic economies, making us a hub for international businesses trading with the rest of the world.

There are huge new opportunities in forward-leaning areas, such as digital, data and services—all the things that Milton Keynes leads in. As my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) said, the CPTPP is a partnership, so—unlike the EU membership that we had—joining does not require us to cede control of our laws, borders or money. That is great news for businesses and great news for our economy.

Mission control: this is global MK. We are on the launch pad. We are ready for lift-off.

10.15 am

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): It is a real pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for securing the debate, and wish to align myself with the warm comments of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) towards his good self. I followed and appreciated his endeavours well before I became a Member of this place.

Accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership—yes, I would like to call it the CPTPP as well—will clearly strengthen our place on the world stage, giving us a truly global outlook following our exit from the European Union. Joining this free trade area, which covered some £9 trillion of GDP in 2019 alone, could cut tariffs in vital UK industries such as food and drink, and the automotive sector. To be a little parochial here, that is so important for my Dudley North constituents, the black country and the west midlands as a whole. Accession will also create new opportunities in forward-leaning areas such as digital and data, and across a whole range of services.

Opportunities for trade and collaboration now exist far beyond the confines of the EU, and I know that the British people would want us to pursue membership for the huge benefits that it could bring. It creates the conditions for growth, trade and jobs, and we are well

[*Marco Longhi*]

placed to take advantage of those economic benefits, with several significant free trade agreements already in place. I commend the efforts of the Secretary of State and her wonderful team in securing them in such a short space of time.

All countries have felt the economic pinch from protecting citizens from the horrors of the coronavirus pandemic. The CPTPP will allow us to further diversify our economic resilience and supply chain to build back better. Something that has concerned me over the previous couple of decades, as we have looked at a global Britain, is the issue of onshoring, which has perhaps become of greater significance in particular key sectors of our economy.

The UK is world leading in digital advancement and research. Modern digital trade rules that facilitate free and trusted cross-border data flows remove unnecessary barriers for British businesses, facilitating even more trade, including for some of our world-renowned products. The CPTPP is a very-high-standards agreement, and the rules will have huge benefits for the UK. The reality is that UK products such as beef and lamb have been locked out of overseas markets for unfair reasons, so it is in our interests to sign up to a high-standards agreement that would benefit many of our farmers across the UK significantly.

We already have extremely ambitious standards in areas such as the environment, animal welfare, food standards and intellectual property. It is in our interests to be in agreement with similar ones, so that we can ask the same of other countries and get access to their markets. Accession will grow our economy, increase revenue and create jobs. Let us do it as soon as possible. People are listening. Businesses are listening, and this is about confidence.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now come to the first of the Front-Bench speeches, which will be by Drew Hendry from the Scottish National party, who also wins the prize for the most colourful backdrop.

10.18 am

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP) [V]: Thank you, Mr Hollobone; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on securing this important debate; it is a credit that we are getting the opportunity to speak about it. I have heard the lament about there not being more Opposition speakers; I know that he will be delighted that the SNP is always happy to provide the opposition to the Tories at Westminster.

My hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) pointed out that there is no assessment of CPTPP, and he made some very simple comparisons about losing £4.90, for example, from the deal with the European Union versus gaining 20p from the USA, or Australia for 2p. That is the stark reality.

Today we have heard Members across the Chamber talk about the effects on farming and dairy farmers—I will come to that shortly. We have also heard Members say that they do not want to see a drop in EU trade, but regrettably that has already happened.

There is no deal that will ever make up for what Brexit takes away from us. We simply cannot trust the Tory Westminster Government not to sacrifice protections for our NHS in negotiations to join this bloc.

By the UK Government's own analysis, the trade deals they strike outside the EU cannot make up for the impact of Brexit on the UK economy. A trade agreement with New Zealand is estimated, to be charitable, to have a limited effect on GDP in the long run—the estimated impact is 0%. Indeed, under scenario 2 the UK Government documents state that GDP in New Zealand is estimated to see economic growth of 0.35%, but UK GDP would see a drop of 0.01%. Again, by the UK Government's own estimates, the Japan-UK deal, which has already been signed, will add only 0.07% to UK GDP. That is really tiny, especially when we consider that we could have had a similar agreement anyway as a member of the most successful trading power in the world by far: the EU.

The EU single market accounts for 52% of all UK trade goods exports and 45% of all UK trade services exports. The EU has more agreements with more countries than any trade bloc in the world by far. In 2017, UK exports to CPTPP countries totalled just over £50 billion—about 8.5% of all UK exports. When compared with the EU trade bloc, this will do little to mitigate the damage of losing seamless access to that partner, which accounts for almost half of all trade.

People in Scotland know that rejoining the EU as a full member of the customs union and single market is the best possible option for protecting livelihoods and jobs. The UK Government's constant—but deeply flawed—refrain is that we must instead focus on fast-growing economies outside the EU, but this is an unforgivable act of harm to businesses and trade across the nations of the UK. It fails to acknowledge that, according to the World Bank, the EU has some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. They include our neighbour, independent Ireland, 31st; Hungary, 43rd; and even Malta, 52nd. The UK, incidentally, is 134th.

The CPTPP countries are not necessarily the fastest-growing economies in the world. In 2019, Mexico was ranked 176th; Japan, 159th; and Canada, 131st. After an absolutely terrible start to the year because of the Prime Minister's shameful Brexit deal, joining the CPTPP would be another disastrous blow for Scottish farmers already reeling from this Government's callous disregard for their business.

Figures from the ONS last week show that in February, wheat exports were still down 52%; fish and shellfish exports were down 54%; egg and dairy exports were down 39%; beverage exports were down 34%; cereal exports were still down 40%; and fruit and vegetable exports were still down 54%. Things are getting worse and worse for exporters, all because of the disastrous ideology of this Tory Westminster Government. On top of that, with talk of accession to the CPTPP trading bloc, farmers are genuinely and rightly concerned that existing member countries might insist that the UK lower our standards simply to join, unfairly undercutting our farming industry and again punishing our hard-working farmers here.

The National Farmers Union's submission last month to the House of Lords International Agreements Committee's inquiry into the UK's accession to CPTPP stressed the importance of protecting the UK's current high food and farming standards. This Tory Westminster

Government have had plenty of opportunities to enshrine the current standards of consumer protection, including for agricultural produce. It speaks volumes that they have failed to do so at every single turn. It is clear that the Tories cannot be trusted to protect consumer standards.

Going by past experience, we cannot trust this UK Government to protect our NHS from harm in the CPTPP trade negotiations either, as it has been their policy to join trade partnerships that would allow foreign bids for public contracts through investor-state dispute settlement clauses. The Home Secretary has described Brexit as an opportunity for widespread deregulation. Given the words of many prominent Back-Bench and Front-Bench Tories, it is very easy to see why the public do not trust them. Some 85% of UK exports to the CPTPP are to Australia, Canada, Japan and Singapore, and the UK already has free trade agreements with seven of the 11 CPTPP members—courtesy of agreements made while the UK was in the EU, of course. In the CPTPP, the UK cannot decline to align on too many areas such as ISDS carve-outs for agrifoods, consumer standards and so on, and still expect to become a member. In short, if the UK joins, disastrous consequences are highly likely for some of our exporters.

It is abundantly clear that for Scotland to make the choices that it needs to protect people, protect jobs, protect standards and see that the NHS remains firmly in public hands, it must have the powers to do so. It must soon make a different choice from this Tory Brexit, little Britain approach. It must make better choices as a progressive, outward-facing and normal independent nation.

10.26 am

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on securing the debate.

There may well be positives for Britain from joining the CPTPP; there may also be negatives. The problem is that we just do not know, because the Government still have not published any of their negotiating objectives, or even an impact assessment of the deal. Last week, the International Trade Secretary said that Parliament would have full scrutiny of CPTPP through the Trade and Agriculture Commission—but the Trade and Agriculture Commission is not a parliamentary body, and its work can only supplement parliamentary scrutiny, not replace it. In the absence of any impact assessments, it falls to us to decide for ourselves, and I am sorry to say that it is not looking good for the Government.

British sovereignty, promoting British exports and jobs, protecting the NHS, agriculture, environmental standards, human rights, workers' rights—those are just some of the challenges of the CPTPP. Let us address agriculture, environmental standards and human rights.

Farming has a proud part to play as part of Britain's heritage. Over hundreds of years, we have developed high-quality produce with strict environmental and animal welfare standards. To continue that proud record, which is admired around the world, our farmers cannot afford for this Conservative Government to compromise on standards in trade agreements. The CPTPP could have some minor benefits to the UK's agriculture sector but, as the National Farmers Union states, "CPTPP includes major agricultural exporting countries"—Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

The question for the Government is whether they will have to make concessions that will damage British farming as a price of joining the CPTPP. We do not know what increased market access CPTPP membership will provide for countries such as Australia and New Zealand, but we know that it will have potentially dire consequences for food and animal welfare standards. Will the Government be able to opt out of the parts of the agriculture chapter of the CPTPP agreement that would allow our agriculture sector to be undercut by lower standards of production? Major questions also remain over whether the UK will be able to retain current bans on the import of hormone-treated beef or chlorine-washed chicken.

Next we come to environmental standards. Palm oil is used in food products, detergents, shampoo, cosmetics, biofuel and even ice cream, but palm oil production is wreaking untold destruction on jungle habitats. Palm oil plantations cover more than 27 million hectares of the earth's surface. The industry is pushing endangered species ever closer to extinction, and with their carbon dioxide and methane emissions, palm oil-based biofuels are estimated to have three times the climate impact of fossil fuels. Although the UK has a ban on palm oil imported through biofuels, Malaysia—a CPTPP member country—is one of the largest producers of palm oil, and Malaysian officials want the Government to scrap the protections that we already have against the import of palm oil. Palm oil is just one example, and it is emblematic of the potential dangers of signing up to a deal such as CPTPP. Will we be rule takers on imports of palm oil, or will we be able to insist on maintaining our high environmental standards? Parliamentary scrutiny would tell us.

Then we have human rights. Over the past few months, this Conservative Government have voted down amendments that sought to block trade deals with countries that commit genocide. The Foreign Secretary says that he would rather the UK ignored human rights concerns than lose out on trade agreements. Recently, the Government struck a deal with Cameroon, a country whose Government are carrying out a brutal subjugation of its English-speaking minority population. The Minister knows that even President Trump declined to sign a deal with Cameroon.

Now the Conservatives tell us that we should join the CPTPP, whose members include Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore and Vietnam, all of which permit child labour, forced labour, workplace discrimination, unsafe working conditions and the absence of trade union rights. Are the Government planning to negotiate tougher alternatives to the current clauses in CPTPP, which permit lower standards of production using exploited workers, or not? Although the Secretary of State for International Trade has said previously that the UK has no plans for a bilateral trade deal with China, does the Minister share my concern that a deal with China could take place by the back door via the CPTPP, or can he tell us whether the UK would be able to veto China's application to join?

On human and workers' rights, full parliamentary scrutiny and consultation with trade unions and human rights groups is essential if the Government want to build confidence that we should join CPTPP. Agriculture,

[*Bill Esterson*]

environmental standards and human rights are just three of a number of CPTPP elements that urgently need to be addressed.

Businesses, workers, freelancers, consumers and the people of Northern Ireland are learning the hard way what a failure to negotiate effectively looks like under this Conservative Government. The trade and continuity agreement with the EU has left gaping holes in trading arrangements that the agreement was meant to deliver after the end of the Brexit transition. We cannot afford a repeat of the failures in the TCA with the application to join CPTPP, so will the Government reopen the 2019 CPTPP public consultation? At the time, it elicited only 55 bespoke responses from business, and the Government's own surveys showed that only 21% of the British public knew what the CPTPP was. There is also the increasingly serious prospect that China may apply to join the CPTPP, which was not a consideration at the time of the survey in 2019.

Scrutiny of negotiating objectives, a full impact assessment and the reopening of the public consultation on CPTPP are all must-haves, as well as a guarantee that we will have at least as much time to examine the final terms of accession before a final vote in the House of Commons, just as the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand Parliaments had before their respective votes.

In the absence of scrutiny, the shadow Secretary of State for International Trade wrote to the Secretary of State, setting out 238 questions that must be answered if the Government are to have any hope of convincing Parliament that this is a good deal. Those questions included the following. Will the Government be able to negotiate exemptions from the CPTPP to address the concerns that I have raised today? What are the implications of joining the CPTPP for the retention of the UK's current prohibitions on the import of hormone-treated beef and chlorine-washed chicken?

Will the UK have the right to impose import restrictions on products containing unsustainably sourced palm oil, and apply those restrictions to Malaysia and other CPTPP countries? How will the Government use their accession to the CPTPP to hold all member countries, including Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore and Vietnam, to the commitments made under article 19.3 of the agreement and demand their compliance with the UK's high standards of human and workers' rights? Are the Government prepared either to veto any application by China to accede to the CPTPP, or to withdraw from the CPTPP, if we do not have that right, so we do not end up in a trade bloc with China by the back door?

Finally, will the Government guarantee at least the same amount of time to scrutinise the terms of the UK's accession before they are put to a vote, as was given to the Parliaments of Australia, Canada and New Zealand?

10.36 am

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. This has been one of the finest Westminster Hall debates that I have attended in 16 years as a Member of Parliament. It is a genuine pleasure to be able to respond to it.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for securing the debate. He made an excellent speech that made my case for CPTPP as well as I could. He gave a brilliant exposition of the benefits. He rightly points out that he was an early enthusiast for joining the CPTPP. Over the years, he has been a forceful advocate for a sovereign, independent trade policy. I know he has welcomed the FTAs that we have already agreed with 67 countries, with Serbia added to the list this week, and with the EU itself, as he pointed out.

I hope to cheer him further by outlining our plans to unleash even more of Britain's trading potential through accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. That is quite a mouthful and comes with the world's hardest-to-pronounce acronym, the CPTPP—in trade, the longer the term, often the more important the content, and that is true of this agreement.

We know that 2020 was a time of unprecedented challenge on every level, but CPTPP is going to be part of the future of this country. Our accession to CPTPP will be central to our endeavour to build back better and to assist our economic recovery, and our preparations are advancing at pace. As colleagues know, on 1 February we submitted our notification of intent to begin the accession process. That was the first formal step before formal negotiations start later in the year. Joining CPTPP would give British firms access to a free trade area worth £9 trillion, made up of 11 like-minded nations that share our commitment to free trade, international co-operation and the rules-based system.

Britain is the first new country to apply to join this trade partnership since it was established in 2018, with big economies such as South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan. A good point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), who knows the region incredibly well, as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Malaysia and the Association of Southeast Nations region. All of those also show interest in membership.

It is a high-standards agreement between sovereign nations, which together account for 13% of global GDP. UK membership would increase that share by nearly 20%, to 16% overall. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe pointed out, we are not a small nation. Equally, nothing in CPTPP will impinge on our domestic right to regulate, which was one of his key questions.

This is very much a business-focused agreement, removing tariffs on 95% of goods traded between members and reducing other barriers to trade. The UK already does more than £110 billion-worth of trade with individual CPTPP members, and the average growth rate is 8% per annum. Some of our closest trade allies—Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore—are there, as are big actual or potential markets, such as Mexico, Vietnam and Malaysia, but our membership would take those trade ties to another level, opening up even more opportunities for businesses of all kinds and all sizes across the United Kingdom, spurring growth, generating jobs, delivering prosperity the length and breadth of our country and helping us to level up opportunity nationwide.

This is good news for all regions and nations of the UK, which can strengthen their already lucrative trade ties with these markets. In 2019, for example, more than

£3 billion-worth of goods were exported to CPTPP nations from the east midlands alone, together with £2 billion-worth from the north-west of England and £2.4 billion-worth from Scotland. With accession, those bonds of prosperity are set to strengthen and deepen in the years ahead.

To look at specific benefits for Britain in cutting-edge sectors that are shaping the world of tomorrow, from digital trade to tech and automation—these points were made by my hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe and for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt)—accession would allow us to work even more closely together with other members on the development of modern digital trade rules that facilitate free and trusted cross-border trade flows and remove unnecessary barriers to business. That point was also made extremely well by my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), who spoke first in the Back-Bench contributions.

The depth and breadth of the CPTPP's e-commerce chapter provide a platform for the UK to help to shape, together with big global players in the sector, the emerging digital trading rulebook. These markets offer exciting new opportunities for British tech innovators as we seek to bind the UK, which is after all Europe's tech capital, ever more closely with the dynamism of the Asia-Pacific region, unlocking ever greater digital trade potential between us as we build on the nearly £19 billion-worth of digitally delivered services that the UK exported to CPTPP countries in 2019. Those points were localised really well by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North in his "Global MK" speech, which I think will have gone down very well in his local area.

Accession would also make it easier for British business people to travel between member countries via the potential for faster and cheaper business visas—a point made very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher). To return to a key question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe, access to the agreement's dedicated chapter on small and medium-sized enterprises will ease barriers to trade for small firms by cutting tariffs and reducing red tape, giving thousands of British SMEs greater access to these vibrant markets. A really important feature of modern free trade deals is the SME chapter. A free trade agreement can seem incredibly forbidding—a typical free trade agreement has 700 or 800 pages. Someone running an SME will not have the time, let alone perhaps the inclination, to read a 700 or 800-page agreement. The idea of the SME chapter is that it allows a company to navigate the free trade agreement and take advantage of things such as Government publicity about what is available there; it eases the passage for an SME and particularly a first-time exporter.

In addition, there is the potential for swifter elimination of tariffs on key British exports, including whisky. I look over to my friend from the Democratic Unionist party, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). There is that potential on whisky tariffs. Of course, everybody likes to think about Scotch, but what about Irish whiskey? I have a very good relationship with the Irish Whiskey Association, and we also always promote Irish whiskey—as well as cars, a point of particular relevance to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi), and the automotive industry.

We could also benefit from the rules-of-origin provisions, which mean that goods produced in any country within the CPTPP will be classed as originating in the free

trade area. To give just one example, cars made in the UK could use more Japanese-made parts, such as batteries, and still qualify for tariff reductions when the completed cars are exported to other CPTPP members—for example, Canada. They would count as being of qualifying CPTPP origin. That is a win-win scenario for the British economy.

On parliamentary scrutiny, which has been raised a couple of times, this Government are committed to transparency and we will ensure that parliamentarians, UK citizens and businesses have access to information on our trade negotiations. On 7 December last year, the Secretary of State for International Trade made a written statement outlining the transparency and scrutiny arrangements that will apply to our new FTAs. I am pleased to confirm that those will also apply to the CPTPP negotiations. Before the launch of formal negotiations, we will publish our objectives, alongside a response to the public consultation that has already been held, which the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) referred to, and an initial economic scoping assessment, which the Chair of the International Trade Committee, the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), referred to. He seems, however, already to have made up his mind about what will be in the economic assessment, but I shall see him later, when I appear before his Committee, and perhaps we will continue the discussion at that point.

We will continue to keep Parliament and the public informed of the progress of negotiations via regular updates, working closely with the relevant Committees in both Houses. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe sought an explainer. That is exactly what a lot of the documentation is intended to do—to explain the potential and actual benefits from the free trade agreement. As to the point that the hon. Member for Strangford made about a full debate, I would welcome one. I welcome this morning's debate, and in the Department for International Trade we welcome the opportunity to explain and expand on Britain's free trading future.

Most of the questions raised by the hon. Member for Sefton Central will, I think, be answered when we publish the negotiation objectives shortly, but to deal with one of his points—the idea that CPTPP will be a back door for a trade deal with China—I cannot make it clearer that there are no plans or intentions for a UK trade deal with China. It is very unlikely that China would meet the requirements for the CPTPP at the moment, and it is worth not forgetting that it is subject to the veto of existing CPTPP members, which, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, do not yet include the UK. However, we might ask whether China would be welcomed by the existing members of the organisation.

We heard some rather tired, familiar arguments from the SNP Front Bench. I think that the party is always much more interested in debating Brexit than the UK's trading future. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) did not like CPTPP, and I was not the least bit surprised, because the SNP has never supported any trade agreement negotiated by either the European Union or the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman may have a nice backdrop, but as to the content of his speech, it expounded the virtues of EU trade agreements, not a single one of which the SNP ever supported. The SNP voted against the Canada deal and it failed to support the Japan deal

[Greg Hands]

and the Singapore deal. Those deals were negotiated by the EU, which the hon. Gentleman now praises; so I do not think we will take any words from him. I did not for a moment expect him to support the CPTPP trade deal. The SNP is anti-trade, anti-Scotland and anti-Scotland's best economic interests.

The hon. Member for Strangford raised an important point about ISDS. I should point out that ISDS procedures are already in place in 90 bilateral UK trade deals. We have never lost a case. We strongly believe that we have nothing to fear from ISDS, but we will shortly publish our negotiation objectives, which will include that important question.

Richard Graham: On the point from the SNP about what is really in Scotland's best interests, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is curious that at this time, when those of us who are trade envoys to the south-east Asian region are doing so much to push for greater access for some of our great drink and food products, including Scotch whisky, the hon. Gentleman cannot see the advantages of the dialogue partner status with ASEAN and the TPP arrangements that the Minister is pursuing?

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Minister, you have three minutes.

Greg Hands: Thank you, Mr Hollobone. I will not need three minutes, but I will answer my hon. Friend's excellent intervention. I am always shocked by the insular nature of the SNP's approach to trade and the fact that, by the look of things, it does not see any of the advantages of any trade agreements with anyone, but particularly with the far east. The potential for growth for Scottish produce, in particular, in the far east is huge—not just whisky, but also Scottish seafood produce and so on—but the SNP failed at each available opportunity, even when we were members of the European Union, to support any of those trade deals.

I go around the world battering down barriers, particularly to Scotch and Irish whiskey. I have been in Peru and engaged on its metal test. I have been in Taiwan and engaged on its lack of requirement for a lot code on bottles, which incites the counterfeiting of alcohol, and so on. We as the UK Government engage all the time on behalf of Scottish goods and services exports right the way around the world, and we make sure that Scotland's voice is heard around the world and Scottish exports are boosted.

We have been consistently clear that the terms of UK accession to CPTPP must be right for British companies, right for British consumers and right for British farmers. We will negotiate firmly but fairly, and our red lines are well known. The NHS remains off the table, as do our world-class standards, from food and animal welfare to the environment—a data protection point brilliantly raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie).

Accession to CPTPP gives the UK the ability to foster stronger diplomatic and trading links with nations in the Indo-Pacific region, which is at the vanguard of change in the global economy and will be the engine of growth for decades to come. Joining this agreement will help us to harness the export and investment opportunities

that lie before us as the world resets, recovers and returns to growth in the wake of the pandemic, and as we build back better, greener and more sustainably.

I hope my remarks have given a flavour of the vast potential that our membership of the CPTPP promises to bestow during this exciting time; its geostrategic importance, which was raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe and for Gloucester and others; the Indo-Pacific tilt, and the fact that we are doing this with some of our best friends; and the huge markets that are involved, with great potential. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe again for securing this invaluable debate.

10.51 am

Mr Steve Baker: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend the Minister. Like him, I have hugely enjoyed this debate. He enjoys my unqualified support, so I will turn my remarks to some other aspects of the debate.

I thought that the best part of the contributions from the Front-Bench spokesmen for the SNP and the Labour party was their vivid illustration of the shortcomings of virtual proceedings, because we were not able to intervene on them to explode the fallacies in their speeches. I regret that they are not able to intervene on me now, and I look forward to them supporting the full resumption of proceedings in the main Chamber and in Westminster Hall, so that we can resume our normal to and fro.

I thought the Labour party were progressive, and yet this progressive agreement is one that they do not wish to support. Of course there are problems with labour standards among the Pacific rim countries, and I would very much like to see those problems addressed and standards driven up. Of course we want to get children out of child labour, and that is why I support a progressive agreement that improves labour standards in the region. If we were to listen to the Labour party, they would have us do a deal with no one who had not already met the standards of the western world, the United Kingdom and the European Union. We can see why they want to be in the EU.

The SNP, of course, is speaking entirely from its own hymn sheet. It wishes to leave the UK and rejoin the EU—that is perfectly plain from what it has said. I refer the SNP, in its pinched and miserable assessment of our economic prospects, to an article by the well-known pro-EU commentator Wolfgang Münchau—he often, of course, writes for the *Financial Times*—in his own *Eurointelligence*:

“So much for the Brexit scare stories”—

he writes—

“Apart from a short-lived disruption of trade flows Brexit has been a macroeconomic non-event... If you look at the latest IMF data and projections in the graphic above, you don't find a discernible macroeconomic effect of Brexit in the first ten years after the referendum.”

Bill Esterson: Tell that to the people who are losing their livelihoods—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. Members participating virtually are not allowed to intervene on any speakers in the room. If you persist, I am afraid we will cut you off.

Mr Steve Baker: Thank you, Mr Hollobone. It is only because of the manner of the speeches by the Opposition spokesmen that I am choosing to attack what they said. I look forward to them supporting the resumption of proceedings.

I have previously critiqued the computable general equilibrium modelling that is used, and I think that Opposition Members' simplistic analysis and arithmetic shows that they, too, should look at the shortcomings of CGE models and at what can be done in the UK. Lord Lawson of Blaby has said that UK domestic settings will be dominant in our future, and that is something that Wolfgang Münchau turns out to agree with.

Turning to other colleagues, I enjoyed their speeches enormously—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid the hon. Gentleman will not be able to do that.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

10.55 am

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19 and Health Inequalities: West Yorkshire

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid proceedings. Members should clean their spaces before they use them and when they leave. Also, Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn when not speaking.

11.1 am

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered health inequalities and the covid-19 outbreak in West Yorkshire.

Thank you for calling me, Mr Hollobone. I thank everyone who has enabled me to secure this important debate so that a Yorkshire voice can make the case. I will be speaking about covid and the vaccine, so first I should like to place on record our thanks from every part of the House to everyone who helped to develop the vaccine, be they scientists, pharmacologists or all the people who have rolled it out. It has been an incredible journey, which shows humanity in a common endeavour against a disease. I congratulate all those involved.

I need not detain the House for long, but I will make a clear case for my constituency in West Yorkshire, where I have lived all my life, although there are lessons for the rest of the country, too. Let me raise two brief points before I get to the central issue. First, statistics. They talk about lies and statistics. I have confidence in the statistics that I will use, because I have been tracking what has been happening since January. They vary a bit, but I am sure that the trends I will describe are correct.

I will use comparisons between my area and the Minister's area—not to suggest that somehow she has been neglectful of our area while protecting hers, but because the differences are extraordinary. Not for one second do I think she is anything other than someone who wants to do their best for the whole country. However, there are chronic underlying problems in the way that our country is organised. The Government have said they will begin to level up; hon. Members will see how far we have to go. If I were to draw a map of England—the health service that we are responsible for—and shade the economic-social demography, it would be clear that there continues to be a north-south divide. If I were to draw a map of covid, the same would apply. It is striking.

The averages conceal quite a bit; none the less, there has been a rapid decline in covid infections. The figures that I will quote are per 100,000. In January, there were 406 infections per 100,000; now, it is 28 per 100,000. That is remarkable.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I am really interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Are the figures that he just gave for West Yorkshire?

Jon Trickett: The figures were for the UK as a whole. It has gone from 406 in January to 28 now. We often hear that no one is safe unless everybody is safe. There are clear hotspots where the infection is still raging, while in other areas it has almost been eliminated. To make the areas that are already low safe, we have to tackle the hotspots.

[Jon Trickett]

The UK average is now 28 infections per 100,000, but in my council area it is three times higher, at 72 per 100,000. In West Suffolk, infections are 8.4 per 100,000. Infections are nine times higher in my area of Wakefield than in the Minister's constituency. That is a staggering difference.

I represent 23 small former mining villages in my constituency. In one ward, the figure is five times higher than the English average, but 17 times higher than the figure for the Minister's constituency. It is staggering. Across the whole of West Yorkshire, there are 20 areas with levels of ongoing infection that are at least 12 times higher than those in her area. Mine is not even the highest in West Yorkshire. The figures are stark.

Plotting a graph—clearly I cannot illustrate it here, although I would like to—shows that the rate of infection in my constituency was around the English average back at the beginning of January. Suddenly, the line on the graph takes off relative to the national average. That was within three or four days of the decision that was taken—by scientists, I presume, but with the support of the Government—to reduce the vaccine supply to Yorkshire. They halved the amount of vaccine coming into Yorkshire. The average rate in England has continued on its way, whereas the rate across Yorkshire has accelerated rapidly. On the other hand, Wakefield—my area—is vaccinating more than the Minister's council is. I assume that it was a short-term reduction in supply of the vaccine, rather than something that is continuing through to this day, but perhaps the Minister could confirm that.

There are four underlying factors. I want to focus on one at the end of my speech, but why is it that some areas of the country have alarming hotspots, such as the ones in my area that I mentioned? The four factors all relate to socioeconomic class, stratification or however one wants to describe it. The first is deprivation. Covid is definitely a disease that feeds off poverty in deprived areas. My constituency is the 111th most deprived; the Minister's constituency is the 417th. Added to that is the fact that I represent former mining communities, where many older men have serious respiratory problems, which obviously makes them vulnerable to a respiratory disease.

The second factor is the cuts that have happened. About 38% of our expenditure has been cut since 2010, which leaves our communities less resilient to all kinds of things, including covid, than they would otherwise be.

The third factor that I want to briefly highlight is the reduction in the number of bed spaces. There has been a kind of consensus that there were too many beds. I never agreed with that; I fought the cuts in the hospitals in my area, unsuccessfully. Some 21,000 beds—I think I am right in saying critical care beds—have closed since 2010, which is too many. We were not ready for the pandemic.

I will discuss the fourth factor before I come to the main issue that I want to raise. We have low access to car ownership in my community, and more than a quarter of households do not have access to a car. As I have already said, I represent a series of villages. The buses are not very good and there is not a frequent service—I am sure that many hon. Members could say

the same thing about their areas. It is very hard for someone to get to hospital if they do not have a car and the bus service is rubbish.

There is a problem not simply with the aggregate number of beds throughout the country, but in connection with population sparsity. I wonder whether more work has been done on this issue. I do not necessarily expect the Minister to reply to me now, but has the relationship between sparsity and access to hospital services ever been properly considered? It was in my area, because I made sure that the people who were making the decisions fully understood the implications of closing hospitals and reducing the number of beds. There are 10,300 households with no car in my constituency alone, which is a problem.

My final point, in terms of what is causing not only our area but West Yorkshire to be a hotspot, is to do with homeworking. Anyone looking at the data will see how striking it is that the proportion of the population who are homeworking varies considerably across the country. For example, in Yorkshire just over a third of people are working from home; two thirds are still working at their place of work. That compares with nearly 60% of people working from home in London. In the Minister's region, there are 10% more people working from home than in Yorkshire.

As might be imagined, seven out of 10 people in professional occupations are now working from home, whereas in caring, leisure and other services it is only 15% and among process plant machine operatives it is only 5%. So, 5% compared with 70% shows that there is a stratification issue. Why is that relevant? Because people who are working from home are clearly less prone or susceptible to possible disease transmission at a place of work. As their place of work is their home, they are in their domestic bubble.

It is striking that homeworking or working in the workplace relates precisely to occupational structure and the character of the local economy. With an economy such as the one that we have in my area, lots of people work in small manufacturing, warehousing, care services, retailing and other forms of services. We could say that they are all key workers in one form or another because they have kept the country going, but they are working in the workplace rather than at home, so they are exposed to the possibility of workplace transmission.

I have given a lot of figures already, but it is good to get them on the record. Yorkshire has 9% of the English population, but 36% of all workplace transmissions for the whole of the country occurred there. So, it is clear that workplace transmission, reflecting the occupational structure and economic base, is a factor. So, more than a third of all workplace transmissions were in Yorkshire alone, which is an important point.

There is a second related issue, which is access to cars. If someone lives in a village and their place of work is, say, a large warehouse near the A1, then they have to get to work. There are no buses or trains, so what do they do? They share a vehicle, either a minibus or a car, with someone else who lives in the village. The possibility of transmission related to work is clear.

Another point is about the vaccine roll-out. Rightly, the vaccine roll-out tackled the oldest and most vulnerable people first. We are only now arriving at vaccinating the under-50s, but they are the people who are often working in the workplace rather than at home. The vaccine has

not reached many of the people who are working in the workplace and who are obviously the most vulnerable to workplace transmission. I would not suggest that we should have done anything differently, but the Government, and we as a country, need to think clearly about the issue of workplace transmission of the virus.

I have one further point on this matter. Some people might say that we should lock down the hotspots, but that will not work. Why do I say that? Because a lockdown affects people who are not key workers. People who work in key industries, such as retailing, care or warehousing, if they are delivering important services or commodities, are still going to work. A lockdown does not protect the people who are at work, and therefore it does not prevent workplace transmission. That seems to be quite an issue for us. Again, I am not saying that the Government were wrong to do the regional lockdowns—we could clearly see that those had an effect—but at the end of the day, they abandoned them. I do not want anyone to listen to my points and say to themselves, “Well, actually there’s a bit of a problem in Yorkshire. We need to protect other parts of the country; let’s lock down Yorkshire.”

If I am right—I would be interested to know whether the Government have other statistics on this—workplace transmission is a serious issue. I spoke about that with the local GP in the most seriously affected village in my constituency, and he thought that it is now about workplaces, and car and minibus sharing. I spoke to the director of public health, who told me broadly the same thing. She said that the figures are slightly susceptible to small variations at ward level, but she still defended them. I then spoke to the chief executive of our health trust. Obviously, he was most concerned about the number of hospital admissions; although that number is now going down because of the medical treatment that we have developed, the ratio is still far too high in our area. He also thought that workplace transmission was an issue.

What do I think ought to happen? Well, the Government may well have already formed a view about workplace transmission. I read in this morning’s newspaper, which covered some of the issues that I am trying to raise, that the Government had responded by saying, “We’ve made available to employers the possibility for an enhanced test, trace and isolate service.” Although I welcome that, because there needs to be as much emphasis as possible on trying to find out who is infected and ensuring that they isolate, there are two problems. First, some people are on very low wages and will not necessarily volunteer that they have symptoms because they are worried about the financial impact on themselves and their households. Secondly, employers are variable, just like any other part of the population. Some employers are very careful, others less so.

I have been approached by a firm, which I will not name, that has a large warehouse in my constituency. It is a household name that provides goods on the high street—everybody knows the name. The workforce, most of whom live in my area, have repeatedly raised with us a sense of not feeling safe at work. I asked the council to visit the employer, and work has been done to make the warehouse a safer place and to reduce transmission. However, my point about sharing cars to and from work still stands, as people share cars if they are not on large incomes or if they live in rural areas such as mine.

Also, at the start and end of shifts large numbers of workers are squashed into a small space to get in and out of the workplace, so there are lots of opportunities for workplace transmission.

The employer said to me, “Well, we have told people that if they don’t feel safe, they can go home, but we won’t pay them and we won’t furlough them.” That is not acceptable behaviour from an employer in 2021. It is simply unacceptable that they leave people feeling exposed and at risk but then say, “It’s up to them, but we won’t pay them. They can stay at home with no money.” I live in a fairly poor area, and that is not an acceptable prospect.

Here is what I hope might happen—that the Government and the public authorities accept that employers and employees have a duty and an obligation to try to eliminate covid at work and elsewhere. I do not think it is good enough simply to leave it to the employers. The public authorities need to intervene in hotspot areas and identify what is going wrong. Although the figures in my area are going down quite rapidly, as a multiple of the average, they are horrific, really. It is unacceptable that we are in this situation.

On Tuesday I spoke to Wakefield Council leader Denise Jeffery. I asked whether it was possible for her public health people to identify hotspots of transmission and move in—almost like a hit squad—to test and trace, and perhaps also accelerate the vaccination programme, although that might undermine the Government’s age-related vaccination priorities.

Will the Minister reflect on the points that I have raised and could we have a further exchange, to see what can be done to tackle this chronic problem? I thank the House for listening so courteously.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate can last until 11.30 am.

11.20 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) on securing time for this important debate and showing that one reason why Westminster Hall is important is that it enables us to discuss the local as well as the national.

I very much associate myself with the hon. Gentleman’s thanks to those who have worked so hard to keep us safe through an unprecedented time for our country. I agree that we come from different communities, but the underlying issue is that none of us is safe until everyone is safe; I keep that in mind as I respond to his points.

In case we run out of time, I should say that I will of course meet the hon. Gentleman again because some of his points relate to key things that we want to work on. I know that directors of public health and his local authority have been doubling down on this issue because it is very important that we suppress. Although we are on a downward trajectory, we are all going to have to learn to live in a covid-tinged world, so we need to be aware of the things that he has highlighted.

Covid-19 has highlighted health inequalities across the country. As the hon. Gentleman said, his constituency was a mining community and some disease types are particularly prevalent among men there. We often see higher rates of smoking in areas such as the one that he

[*Jo Churchill*]

represents. All have been a keen focus for me during the past 18 months or two years, and also for the Office for Health Promotion going forward, because all these things need to be looked at in the round.

I emphasise that as we rebuild from the pandemic, we are committed to tackling the long-term problems and levelling up. People should have the right to good healthcare, a good life and good life expectancy, wherever in the country they live. The NHS has committed to inclusive recovery from the pandemic and has set out eight actions to reduce inequality in the restoration of services. I do not cover hospital services, on which the hon. Gentleman spoke at some length, but he is free to write to the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), who looks after those. Reporting on providing services to the poorest in our areas is one of the actions.

My focus has been, and remains, tackling inequalities through the health and social care system and promoting health among disproportionately disadvantaged groups, because targeting everybody often only enlarges the gap. The hon. Member for Hemsworth highlighted several issues, and targeting and focused approaches work better.

The best way to improve life expectancy and reduce health inequalities is to prevent health problems from starting in the first place. Prevention is one of the top five areas for the health service and it is my focus, going forward. In March, we announced that the Office for Health Promotion would lead the national effort in improving and levelling up public health. That will enable a more joined-up, sustained approach and action between the NHS and national and local government. The hon. Member talked in the end about how we drive these interventions to address the wider determinants of health, ensuring that we have longer, better quality years and that we drive down health inequalities through the health and social care policy.

The West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership supports some 2.7 million people and takes a place-based approach, which is totally right, to highlight the strengths, capacity and knowledge of those involved. Wakefield clinical commissioning group has developed a health inequalities prevention pathway and housing for health network—as we know, some of the determinants do not always sit within health; they sit in other areas, such as the quality of work that people have, and the homes in which they live—to support the reduction of barriers to services and deliver the recommendations from our ethnic minorities review.

That collaborative work has led to good practice being shared that saves lives and prevents illness. That includes the Healthy Hearts project, which the hon. Member for Hemsworth probably knows well. It originated in Bradford, but has been scaled up right across West Yorkshire and Harrogate, aiming to prevent 1,200 heart attacks and strokes over the next 10 years. The partnership also launched a new targeted prevention grant fund worth £100,000 to help reduce the gap in health inequalities across the area, supporting targeted, community-level preventive interventions that reduce harmful health behaviours, improve health outcomes and support those disproportionately affected by covid-19.

I wonder whether there is some targeting, because on some of the things that the hon. Member mentioned, such as people travelling in cars—I know exactly what he is alluding to, as my background is in construction—it is about ensuring that we all reinforce the messages: “If you are sharing a car, do not sit next to somebody; sit with a distance between you. Keep windows open and wear face masks.” All those things are important.

We will build on action that we have taken to limit the impact in West Yorkshire. The local teams, with national support, have managed outbreaks in many kinds of settings, and have done a brilliant job, including in care homes, meat factories, bed factories and general practice surgeries and within the professional football team. I know that covid-19 has affected some groups disproportionately. The Public Health England review last July identified age, occupation and ethnicity as particular risks. We therefore built up the community champions scheme, providing nearly £24 million to local authorities and the voluntary sector to improve communication for those most at risk.

The scheme is investing nearly £1.4 million to support ethnic minority groups across communities and faiths in Bradford, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. We have mobilised 700 volunteers and are training 300 residents locally. In Wakefield, we have developed specific covid-19 and vaccine messages, working with English for speakers of other languages tutors, and community leaders such as mosque and black African church leaders. Community champions have contributed to the successful vaccination programme, as has the rolling out of information in different languages. That may also be something that we need to look at doing more effectively, but we have done a great deal of work on it. We can take that up at a further meeting.

The NHS has met the target for offering everyone in the cohorts their first vaccine by mid-April. More than a million people in West Yorkshire have received their first vaccination, in line with the national uptake rate. Vaccines were distributed fairly across the UK. It was a mammoth job. Somebody always has to be at the top and somebody not so near the top, but there is now much more balance. We have targeted the top nine groups. They are those at most risk from dying if they catch covid. That is the strategy that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, Jon Van-Tam and the Secretary of State have spoken about many times, explaining that we are protecting the most vulnerable.

I am aware of various barriers to vaccine uptake, but we have focused on that gap and driven it down, and it is now diminishing. We are working across Government to consider how we best support people and produce tailored outreach services, providing materials in a variety of languages and formats. We have also used outreach to approach targeted areas and communities.

There is a duty of care on workplaces to their employees to ensure that workplaces are covid-secure. It is only by us all working in lockstep that we can give everybody the same opportunity to have long, healthy lives wherever they live, wherever they work and whatever their background. Learning from the ways in which things have been done—the different deliveries—will help us going forward. I am happy to meet with the hon. Member, but the Department and I are determined to

tackle both the long and short-term health inequalities that remain in Yorkshire, and to ensure that we help people.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Special Educational Needs

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will also be suspensions between each debate.

I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in the Boothroyd Room, and are expected to remain for the entire debate. I must also remind Members participating virtually that they are visible at all times, I am afraid, both to each other and to us in the Boothroyd Room—so you are on “Candid Camera”, but you are all very good looking.

If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks email address. Members attending physically should clean the spaces before they use them and when they leave the room. I remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

2.31 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered support for children with SEND.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I am grateful to have secured this important debate, and welcome the opportunity to discuss support for children with special educational needs and disabilities. I am pleased that we are addressing this important issue today, and want to use my contribution to amplify the voices of children with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families.

I know that Members who have come to speak in the debate, from across the House, will have heard from constituents about the difficulties that they have faced in getting access to services, support systems and schooling. They will have been approached by parents who are not sure where else to turn, as they navigate a global pandemic with a child with a disability. I hope that we can all use today as a collective opportunity to raise the concerns of those young people and their families, and push for change and further support.

Ultimately, every child deserves access to the support to which they are entitled, but currently they do not have it. The words

“forgotten, left behind and overlooked”

were used to describe the experiences of children with SEND and their families throughout the covid-19 pandemic, according to the recent report by the all-party parliamentary group for special educational needs and disabilities. It collated responses from parents and young people on the issue. Prior to the pandemic, resources for local authorities and supporting services were already stretched by a decade of needless Tory austerity, and the upheaval of the past year has only exacerbated the problem.

One of the most pressing issues that I have come across is the continued delays to treatment, diagnosis and plans for support. In my constituency I have been

[Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési]

approached by constituents who have been waiting for up to two years for a diagnosis for their child. That is simply unacceptable. If children are unable to get a diagnosis, they are unable to get early intervention, which we know improves their outcomes later in life. Yet that window is being missed for many young people simply because of lack of funding and resources.

As the chair of the NHS East Berkshire clinical commissioning group, Dr Jim O'Donnell, highlighted to me, identifying those with SEND is just as important as ensuring that they get the support they need. In Slough, only 0.34% of our registered population are coded as having a learning disability. That is less than one-seventh of the estimated national prevalence.

The national target achievement for health checks in relation to learning disabilities is 67%. In Slough we currently reach only 61.5% of those who are coded; but since we are not yet successfully coding most of the people who, it is estimated, would have learning disabilities, health checks are in fact being delivered only to 0.21% of the population. That is, by the way, a far better figure than many of our neighbours have reached. It just goes to show how far we need to improve as a country to be in a position to ensure that people with learning disabilities receive the recognition, support and health and care services that they need and deserve.

Delays in the sector also aggravate the existing difficulties faced. In some cases this can lead to mental health difficulties for both the child and the parent awaiting confirmation of their child's diagnosis and therefore support. At this point such delays can mean the additional issues caused are not taken into account in their education, health and care plan. It is a vicious cycle where everyone loses.

To address the backlog and delays in the initial stages of setting up support for children and parents, urgent funding and attention is needed. Delays have been seen across sectors, but for children with SEND these could have lifelong consequences. Even those who have been able to secure support and EHCPs have felt that the process has only worsened under the pandemic. The process must have compassion and the child's needs at its heart, yet constituents who have contacted me often feel frustrated, fighting to get their views considered as the child's primary carer, and even having to push to get specific support written into the plans.

One local family noted that their support was not quantified or specified, leaving them disappointed at the level of support as one treatment would have fulfilled their support requirements. This is a pattern. In fact, two in three parents reported that their child was not receiving the support set out by law in their plan. If parents have to fight at every single stage just to get the very basic level of support for them and their child, I am afraid the system is broken, and coronavirus has further diminished this already inadequate support. As with other vital local services, many have been stopped or reduced since March 2020.

Ambitious About Autism reported that 80% of autistic young people and their parents who responded to its survey said that support that they had been accessing before the pandemic either stopped or was reduced. 1Voice found that 58% of respondents to its survey had no care support at all between March and July. All this is in the context of a system already in crisis.

The recent Women and Equalities Select Committee report cited evidence that it received:

"the pandemic had 'brought into focus and exacerbated widely acknowledged pre-existing systemic issues in the wider SEND system', which was far from operating as the 2014 Children and Families Act reforms had intended".

Although school closures have undoubtedly impacted every child in this country, it seems that for disabled children, sadly, that impact has been disproportionate. Despite many settings remaining open throughout successive lockdowns, 83% did not have access to school between March and July. As we know, attending school is for so much more than just an education. For children with SEND in particular, it is an opportunity to receive treatment and access specialised equipment, and it can be hugely beneficial for their all-round development. Yet parents were left with difficult decisions about the best outcome for their children.

Parents, local authorities, support services and schools have had to strike a very careful balance in protecting the child's health and the health of children with SEND from the threat of coronavirus and the impact of continued isolation. Even when children have been able to return to schooling, the lack of treatment during successive lockdowns has meant that many have fallen behind on their speech, communication and motor skills. Unable to access formal therapies, assistive technologies, respite care or regular treatment, many parents have noted a decline in disabled children's physical and mental wellbeing. As the Disabled Children's Partnership notes,

"If young people are in pain, they will not be ready to learn."

Devastatingly, it is not just formal support that has declined. Social isolation of disabled children and their families has also had an impact; reports indicate that they are more socially isolated than most. The removal of routine, socialisation and normality has left 90% of parents with some level of anxiety as a result. The clear disproportionate impact of covid-19 on these families surely deserves a dedicated plan to support them. Without a complete plan from Government on how to address the backlog, already stretched services will struggle for resources as we emerge from lockdown. Through no fault of their own, disabled children and their families have been left behind. They need the SEND report to address the deep problems in the system, they need to be a feature of all future pandemic planning, and they need specific funding to address the huge delays and backlogs.

I know that local authorities and charities across the country have been doing what they can to support those who need it most. In Slough, our council has been working hard to ensure better outcomes for children with SEND—in fact, the south-east's all-age autism strategy is being launched today. It sets out the region's ambition to ensure that autistic people and their families get the best care and support, and to reduce the health inequalities that autistic people face.

Having served as a member of the Royal Mencap Society, I am very much aware of the incredible work of the voluntary sector. Invaluable work has been done by charities and organisations such as the Disabled Children's Partnership, which includes Mencap, WellChild, Together for Short Lives, the Children's Trust, Scope, Sense, the National Autistic Society, Family Fund, the Council for Disabled Children, Ambitious About Autism, Contact and Action for Children, as well as by IPSEA—the

Independent Provider of Special Educational Advice—and many others, but funding and support for SEND have long needed attention from the Government.

Sadly, it has taken a pandemic to reveal the true extent of the problems in the system. Can the Minister confirm that these deep-rooted problems will be addressed? Can she guarantee that the Government will not downgrade their legal duties to children with SEND as a result of the current widespread failure to fulfil them?

One parent cited in the APPG report noted that for children with SEND,

“Their worlds were already very confusing before coronavirus and are even more so now.”

We must do all we can to support them.

2.42 pm

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con) [V]: I welcome this important debate secured by the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi). As vice-chair of the APPG on special educational needs and disabilities, I highlight our recent report, “Forgotten. Left behind. Overlooked. The experiences of young people with SEND and their educational transitions during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020”. Members of the APPG were keen to focus our inquiry on how the transitions that young people with SEND face had been affected by the significant changes in education provision since March 2020 due to the pandemic.

It is widely accepted that moving between education settings, either for a change of phase or for enhanced or different provision, is difficult for all children, but it is clear from the experiences we heard about that the pandemic had the most negative impact on some of our most vulnerable children, young people and their families. In 2014, the Government introduced significant reforms to the way in which children and young people with SEND are identified and supported, requiring local authorities to have greater regard to the needs of children with SEND and their parents. It is concerning and often heart-rending to hear of the difficulties that some families face in securing enough support and appropriate placements for pupils with SEND.

What is apparent is how many families have to fight for the right support for their child. That is not right. The process of applying and assessing for educational healthcare plans must be made simpler and more compassionate. It is also clear that there are regional variations in the experiences of young people with SEND. That is very concerning. For example, the National Deaf Children’s Society noted that online learning materials, transition support, early intervention support and recovery plans were available, but “not consistently across England”. Sense also spoke of a lack of consistency.

It is welcome that the Government have acknowledged that despite the important reforms introduced to improve support for young people with SEND, the system is not working for every pupil. I look forward to the cross-Government SEND review being published in the coming weeks, as one of the issues it is looking at is how to ensure that SEND provision is consistent all over the country, of high quality and integrated across education, health and care.

I am grateful to the Minister for the work she has done regarding the review and for her comments at the recent annual general meeting of the APPG for SEND in March. I welcome the recent capital funding boost of

£280 million for children and young people with SEND, and investment to provide more specialist places and improve provision for SEND pupils across the country.

It is also very good news that the high-needs funding has been boosted by nearly a quarter to £8 billion in 2021-22, with an extra £780 million for local authorities this year, and a further £730 million in the next financial year. The Government are supporting local authorities and their partners to improve SEND services for every young person with an education, health and care plan. That includes the programme of inspections and interim visits by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission to check the quality of provision, as well as direct support and challenge to individual areas.

I ask the Minister to look more closely at how central Government pass on funding to local authorities for pupils with high needs. Currently, a large proportion of funding allocated through the high-needs funding formula is based on historical spending patterns, meaning that if needs go up or down from year to year, that is not fully reflected in the local budgets. It also means that local authorities that have been responsible with spending, such as East Sussex County Council, are left short of vital funding. That may mean that a pupil in one local authority could attract significantly more or less funding than a pupil in another authority, despite having similar needs.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight that in Hastings we will see a new SEND free school, the Flagship School, open its doors in September. I am grateful to the Department for Education for its vital support in this much-needed initiative. Lastly, I respectfully ask the Minister to give detailed consideration to the recommendations in the APPG’s report.

2.47 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)[V]: I thank you, Sir Edward, for chairing, and my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) for leading this important debate. One does not have to be a parent to want to live in the kind of society where every adult and child is treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their background, ability or race.

As a parent, of course, I worry about my young daughter, but not just her. I worry about the world she will grow up in, the country she will call her own and the community she will be a part of. That means I want a society for her where every person—every child and every adult—is treated with dignity and respect. That is what I see as our responsibility as lawmakers: to create the conditions where every child and adult can thrive.

Yet I am all too aware that that is currently not the case, particularly in the experience of children with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families. The parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities in Norwich South tell me about the unending barriers they face when trying to get support. Many are part of the fantastic organisation, SENSational Families.

To start, the length of time it takes to get a diagnosis for many children means that their needs are not being met from the beginning. In Norfolk, it takes roughly two years for children to get a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism spectrum disorder. That is two years of anxiety, waiting to get a child the support they need. Even once they have the diagnosis,

[Clive Lewis]

families find more delays in getting an education, health and care plan in place. Norfolk is one of the 10 lowest-performing authorities in the country. Only 20% of EHC plans are completed within the Government's 20-week timescale. It is appalling that 80% of EHC plans are, by the Government's own metrics, not being completed on time.

When it comes to finding a school place for their child, there is more agony, anxiety and frustration. There is a severe shortage of specialist places available in Norfolk, which leaves many children struggling in mainstream schools or being excluded. Parents tell me they have to fight at every juncture for the rights of their children. If they do not continually fight, the children end up out of education. They also explain how it seems that parents who shout the loudest get the support. In addition, parents can speed up getting a diagnosis by paying privately, at a cost of around £1,500, meaning that we have a two-tier system where more wealth and money gets people access to better services faster. Is that really the kind of society that we want to live in? Should children be deprived of essential and life-enhancing services because their families cannot afford to fast-track their diagnoses?

The work done by the all-party parliamentary group for special educational needs and disabilities, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake), chimes with much of what I am hearing in my constituency: young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families, feel forgotten, left behind and overlooked. It should not have to be this hard, and it certainly does not have to be this way.

The struggle faced by the parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities is not just about access to education or services. The lack of specialist places and delays in diagnosis are symptoms of much deeper problems caused by the failure of successive Conservative Governments to invest in creating strong social infrastructure. Those children and their parents need not only the right educational support, but safe and affordable housing, universal healthcare, a universal basic income and financial support that lessens the burdens on carers—strong social infrastructure that ensures that every person in our society can lead a dignified and fulfilling life.

I support the calls from the Disabled Children's Partnership for an ambitious, funded covid-19 recovery plan to help children catch up on a lost year. Beyond that, we must also invest in the social infrastructure of this country, so that we have a fair and green recovery from the pandemic, which leaves no one behind. Children with special educational needs and disabilities and their parents are being failed by the system at every turn. We can do better; we must do better.

2.51 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) for introducing this much-needed debate.

For a number of years, the Bedford Inclusive Learning and Training Trust, or BILTT, has raised concerns about insufficient funding for its three special educational

needs schools in Kempston: St John's School, Grange Academy and Greys Education Centre. They are the most dedicated team of people, and they want the best for their pupils, but the current funding model means that their kids do not even get what is fair.

As hon. Members will be aware, the Education Committee's report, "A 10-year plan for school and college funding" found SEND funding provision to be totally inadequate. Back in 2013, the Government announced funding for SEND pupils of £10,000 per place, with local authorities topping that up depending on pupils' needs, typically via grants. Schools, like all parts of the public sector, have been affected by Government-imposed austerity over the past decade, but since 2013, mainstream schools have received funding increases from central Government. SEND pupils in Bedford, however, received no increases in either core funding or top-up funding between 2013-14 and 2019-20.

The DFE is deflecting its responsibilities for SEND pupils on to local government by suggesting that the increased funding has gone to local authorities, to be passed on to relevant schools—that has not happened. The local authority has only increased the top-up element in Bedford by 8.3%, which is the average for mainstream increases during the same period. That can be rectified only if central Government increase the core funding appropriately, so it is at least brought in line with the actual costs. As budgets have been frozen for seven years, and all costs—including staffing costs—have risen, it is impossible to balance future budgets.

As a trust, BILTT has cut back expenditure and staffing, but it cannot safely make any further savings. For the last two years the trust has set a deficit in annual budgets, but as a result of stringent financial management it has until now been able to deliver surpluses. In the Government's extra funding offer for schools during the covid pandemic, schools with an in-year surplus were precluded from applying to cover the extra costs of the pandemic, which is completely short-sighted and patently unfair to the very children most at risk of covid complications. Reaching a surplus does not mean that the money saved is unaccounted for or not needed for planned future spending. Why are children in SEND schools being discriminated against in that way?

As the chair of BILTT told me,

"the funding situation continues to be wholly unsatisfactory, flawed and is continuously systemically discriminatory to pupils in Special Schools and Alternative Provision. These are the most vulnerable pupils in society, that are, increasingly, being underfunded by the current system."

At a time when the Government are undertaking the long-overdue review of the special educational needs and disability system, the existing funding model for children with special educational needs is not fit for purpose. It is fundamentally unfair and needs urgent reform.

2.56 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) for securing this hugely important debate.

The covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated many issues that already existed in the Government's system of support for children and young people with SEND—issues that families, campaigners and workers have been

raising repeatedly with Ministers for many years. Covid has shone a stark light on the inequalities in society. For those children, young people and their families the inequality already faced was amplified.

Along with the injustice of inequality, another theme that is hardwired into the issues raised during the pandemic is the indifference to the seriousness of the situation shown by the Department for Education. Support during the pandemic from the Government and from the Department for Education, as the APPG for SEND summarised in its recent report, did not do enough to support children and young people with SEND. Our most vulnerable children were failed, and schools and families left to pick up the pieces.

Issues have been raised with me by Autism in Motion, a fantastic, committed, parent-led organisation in my constituency of West Derby, that provides support, advice and guidance for families in our community. I do not have time to do justice to their range of concerns in this debate, but I would welcome a meeting with the Minister to go through them in more detail.

Issues include a lack of funding and support from the Government for schools and services for children who have fallen through the gaps, such as children with SEND in mainstream schools who need that extra funding and support to thrive and maximise their educational attainment; a lack of funding for the comprehensive training needed for all teachers and school staff nationally; and the lengthy wait for vital services during covid-19, made worse by the hollowing out of NHS and local authority services through austerity and spending cuts over the past decade. We have seen how austerity measures have decimated our public services when we have needed them most during the pandemic.

I am lucky to have six SEND schools in Liverpool West Derby, which have been remarkable during the pandemic. I pay tribute to the staff. I have met with the heads throughout the period, and the following finding in the APPG's report captures perfectly what I was told:

“The government guidance for special schools and alternative provision was frequently published later than guidance for mainstream schools. This led settings and young people with SEND to be seen as, and feel like, an ‘afterthought’.”

On behalf of my constituents and many families in Liverpool West Derby, I hope the Minister will today be able to answer these questions. What can be put in place for parents of children and young people who do not have an EHC plan and may have slipped through the net in terms of the support that is needed? Many children and young people cannot be catered for remotely and families have struggled during the last year. How will increased needs resulting from that be addressed and what support will the Minister's Department provide? Furthermore, what plans will be put in place to assess the needs that will emerge as a result of the disruption to SEND children's education, mental health and wellbeing caused by the lockdown?

Finally, do the Government have any plans to ensure that the views of children and young people with SEND and their families are heard at this stage in the pandemic? And if they do, what mechanisms will be employed locally, regionally and nationally to capture those views?

3 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward.

I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) on securing this debate on an incredibly important issue, which touches the lives of around 1.4 million children across the country and, as we have heard from those who have spoken, many of us in our constituencies as well.

Today I will raise the slightly more specific issues that parents of autistic children in Luton North have raised with me. How would we feel if we were left waiting for four years to access the support or care that we needed? We all get frustrated when we are left waiting for anything; the next train might be along in 30 minutes, and if someone waited 90 minutes for a meal in a restaurant, they would probably complain. On top of that, how do we feel if we need to access a service or advice, but keep being passed from pillar to post?

So how frustrating must it be for those parents who are left waiting for up to four years for a diagnosis, while their family members are passed around agency after agency and institution after institution, and their child struggles to make friends, is not confident about communicating, is potentially non-verbal, and likes a particular routine and order in the things that they do every day? I have spoken to parents of autistic children in my constituency who are waiting for up to four years for the support that they need. I have heard from them that they feel like they are fighting against the very system that should be helping them, because at present the different agencies do not communicate with each other in the way that they should.

We know that the issues affecting how these parents and their children access care are great in number. We also know that the National Autistic Society and the all-party parliamentary group on autism—a group chaired with great diligence and commitment by the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan), who we sadly lost very recently and who was a very vocal campaigner for autistic children and their parents—found that 70% of parents of children with autism say that support for their child was not put in place quickly enough. We know all this, yet we do not see the improvements and funding that are needed.

Fewer than half of teachers say they are confident about supporting a child on the autism spectrum. The worst aspects of this situation lead to kids being put on the supposedly “too difficult” pile and left in isolation, or excluded or off-rolled by schools, whose staff do not have the training to identify pupils with autism and offer them the support that they need.

The parents that I spoke to in Luton North over Easter are brilliant and they would do absolutely anything they could to get their child the support they need. So, on behalf of those parents, I ask the Minister, does she think that waiting four years for an autism diagnosis is acceptable for children? If her answer is no, will she commit today to introducing a wait time standard for autism diagnosis and support? Will she commit to making life easier for the people that I have talked about today, by streamlining all the agencies and organisations that parents need to engage with? Finally, in the Health and Social Care Committee we have heard about the need for local autism hubs. Will any of those hubs be coming soon? I would welcome a meeting with the Minister to discuss these and other issues.

[Sarah Owen]

This important matter is discussed fairly frequently in this place and many MPs have constituency cases similar to those that I have outlined. However, parents and their children are still waiting for the support that they need.

I want to end on something positive. Councillor Javed Hussain, from Saints ward in Luton, has worked with the community. Despite the austerity and the cuts handed down from central Government, our councillors in Luton, such as Javed Hussain, have secured an accessible sensory play-park upgrade at Blundell Park, which is good for every child but especially good for children with autism and children who use wheelchairs. New developments such as that will make the world of difference to families and I commend the work that has been done on the park. We all know the difference that proper support for children with SEND could make to so many of our constituents. It is time that the Government turned their words into action.

3.4 pm

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir Edward, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) for securing this important debate.

It is a pleasure to speak here today. I have a particular interest in this debate, both as a member of the Women and Equalities Committee and as the mother of a SEND child. As colleagues rightly pointed out, the support system for SEND children was already at crisis point before the start of the pandemic, but like all other existing inequalities, the pandemic has shone a light on the failures within the system that deny young people their right to an education and has shown the urgent need for increased support for young people with SEND, their families and their educational providers.

There are many issues. The long wait in obtaining a child and adolescent mental health services appointment, and the ability to access that appointment, particularly through the pandemic. The process to obtain an EHCP with little or no help or support during the process, and also the lack of support for those who do not qualify for a plan but who clearly need additional support. Schools that are struggling through lack of funding, and parents who are told, "Sorry; there is no money available to support your child further," while all the time the child continues to struggle both at home and at school, quite often with a big impact on their mental and physical health.

The Government recently announced funding premiums to help schools and students catch up, with additional weighting for mainstream schools that have pupils with SEND. However, in the light of experience earlier this year, it is unacceptable that the catch-up premium does not include ring-fenced funding for mainstream schools, which means that there is no guarantee that school leadership teams will direct that money to SEND children, given the already tight constraints on their budgets. Just a week ago, the Women and Equalities Committee published its "Unequal impact? Coronavirus, disability and access to services" report into the impact of coronavirus on disabled people, which widely acknowledged the problems created by a lack of ring-fenced funding for children with SEND in mainstream schools and showed

evidence that such pupils consistently make less progress than other pupils with the same starting point. It is disappointing that the Government rejected the Select Committee's recommendation that funding be increased to allow mainstream schools to receive £240 per pupil with SEND, ring-fenced for catch-up support in this academic year.

Last week, in a Westminster Hall debate, I asked the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work whether he could give me a further explanation as to why the Government rejected the report's recommendation to commit to ring-fenced funding for pupils with SEND in mainstream schools. I did not get a clear answer from the Minister, other than an acknowledgment that the forthcoming SEND review remains a key priority for this Government. I hope that the Minister here today will be able to give her thoughts on this issue, and on whether she agrees that SEND children who go to mainstream school should have the same amount of money ring-fenced as children who go to a special school. The Government have said that it costs more to teach children in special schools. I hope the Minister agrees that it should not matter what school a child goes to, and that a lack of funding for cash-strapped local authorities results in their not being able to give their schools and pupils the additional support that they so desperately need.

This should not be a race to the bottom between mainstream and special schools. It is just a fact that local authorities continue to report the pressures on the high-needs funding block as one of the most serious financial challenges they face. Giving evidence to the all-party parliamentary group for SEND, the Local Government Association said that local authorities will be unable to meet their statutory duties to support children with SEND without additional funding being made available.

I urge the Minister to look deeper into how high-needs funding is undertaken. It is essential to the recovery from the pandemic that these long-standing issues over SEND funding are fixed. Finally, I ask the Minister when the SEND review will be published, and I ask her for a more detailed response than was given to me previously, and that was given in the report in the spring.

3.9 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), my Berkshire colleague, for securing the debate. He made a very interesting contribution. His comments were thoughtful and powerful, and I found the whole tone of the debate interesting and, in many ways, quite humbling. I agree with what has been said by many Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Sarah Owen) and for Jarrow (Kate Osborne), who both made excellent points.

Reading, like many other places, suffers from quite significant underfunding in this important area, as I am sure the Minister is aware, and I will talk about that in some detail later. Our borough council is ranked 132nd out of the 150 English local authorities in terms of the funding that it receives for SEND. Obviously, in an area of considerable need there is a great shortfall for many local families, who are hugely affected by that. I would like to address one particular set of challenges later.

I want to talk about the overall pressure on families at this time and, in particular, to reflect on the very difficult year that so many families have been through. I hope that the Minister will consider, in particular, what this year has meant for those families who have a child with SEND, and the intense additional pressures that those children and families have been through. I would like her to meet some of the families with me and to explore this issue further, because the very difficult issue of SEND and supporting families adequately in the system in a proper way has been exacerbated by the dreadful pandemic. I hope we can discuss that further.

I will move on to the specifics, as I realise that time is pressing. The delays in the raising and diagnosing of particular problems are significant. That has been an issue in this country for many years. We obviously need a much better supply of trained staff and support in schools and other settings. Ultimately, that means more Government spending, because the staff are highly trained graduates who work as part of a team. They need the support of their colleagues in a school or other setting. I have often heard from headteachers and others about the need for that team approach to the proper resourcing of our public sector.

I wonder whether the Minister might meet me to discuss an important issue in my constituency. I do want to go into enormous details because it is sub judice—there is a court case coming up. I would like to discuss with her in person and with a local family the transition of children with SEND from primary to secondary school. I see the Minister is nodding; I appreciate her support. There are some particular issues that our local schools and families may be able to help her to explore further. We would like some support on this issue, but I do not want to go into too much detail because of the court case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North, who spoke eloquently, said that some amazing work has been done in our communities. Like her, I want to thank some local groups. There are too many to mention all of them, but it was a pleasure to help the families and staff at Redlands Primary School in Reading a few days ago with work on their sensory garden. Unfortunately, due to lack of funding, it has been provided by donations. It is a wonderful resource that the families themselves and the school have come up with, to help calm and support children in a Victorian school environment with very limited green space, through careful use of planting and attractive artwork. They are offering therapy for children in their play time, which is very valuable, and I commend them for that work.

Finally, I hope the Minister will look at the wider issue of education funding, particularly support for SEND for the lifetime of the child as they move into adulthood.

3.13 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) on securing this important debate.

Let me start by putting on the record my thanks to the Minister and her officials at the Department for Education for working closely with officers and councillors at the London Borough of Richmond to agree a settlement

for the enormous historic funding gap in special educational needs and disability support. The local high-needs budget deficit hit a staggering £18 million and risked putting general education funding, and indeed wider council services, at risk.

When I was elected in 2019, I pledged to make adequate funding for SEND provision in Twickenham a priority, and I am very grateful for the engagement that the Minister has had with me and the council over the past year to address this important issue. I know that Richmond Council is looking forward to continuing to work with the Department to increase local provision for special needs and ensuring that our most vulnerable children receive the support that they need and deserve, through the promised annual 8% increase in funding. More broadly, I urge the Minister to ensure that the review of SEND that her Department is currently undertaking looks holistically at how the system is funded, so that the best interests and the needs of every child are at the heart of the system.

Too often, children are caught between the competing priorities of school and council budgets. Just recently, the chairs of governing bodies of local schools told me how stretched they are financially because of covid. Many costs are not being reimbursed, and they are losing thousands of pounds because income from lettings and fundraising has dried up. Those mainstream schools that are particularly well placed to provide SEND support for children are very conscious of the £6,000 that they have to find from their core budgets in order to offer this invaluable support, unless the family are able to apply successfully for an education, health and care plan, which will bring its own funding. The decision-making process on the level of support provided should not be driven by funding streams or disincentives to do the right thing, but entirely by the needs of the child.

The Minister is aware that I take a keen interest in children's mental health and have repeatedly raised my concerns about the impact of the pandemic on children and young people's mental health, and the critical importance of supporting social, emotional and developmental catch-up, not just academic catch-up. I know from talking to carers in my constituency that that applies even more to disabled children, who have been disproportionately affected, as we have already heard from other hon. Members, through both social isolation and lack of access to therapies. According to the Disabled Children's Partnership, 91% of the parents it surveyed said that their child was socially isolated through the pandemic. Six in 10 parents reported observing symptoms associated with anxiety, and almost three quarters of parents report that their child is often unhappy, downhearted or tearful. There is a knock-on impact on the mental health and wellbeing of parents and siblings.

As other hon. Members have said, we need a bespoke covid recovery plan for disabled children. That must include, as well as social and developmental catch-up, additional support for the mental health and wellbeing of children and families and access to activities to overcome the social isolation that many have suffered during lockdowns. The Government recently announced a £79 million package of mental health support, but none of it was specifically allocated for disabled children and their families. Every single child deserves the best possible start in life, and that includes every child with a special need or disability.

3.18 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) for initiating this important debate. He was completely right to say that children with SEND have been forgotten, left behind and overlooked, and that their parents have had to fight at every single stage of the process to get their needs met. It is shocking that some children in Slough have had to wait up to two years for a diagnosis. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) made similar points about his area and about how the system has completely failed parents, with appalling social services infrastructure and, in effect, a two-tier system for those who can afford it.

I want to take the opportunity offered by this debate to pay tribute to the fantastic staff at Swiss Cottage School and Manor School in Brent. Both are specialist schools in my constituency and have done phenomenal work in supporting children with SEND. The shadow Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), and I had the privilege of speaking to the headteachers of those schools and other special schools across the country in a virtual roundtable earlier this year. Many of the headteachers pointed out to me that much of the digital support that schools have been given, such as laptops, is not even appropriately tailored for the needs of children with SEND.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) also explained how he had heard many concerns about resources when he met headteachers in his region. My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) made powerful arguments about the devastating impact of coronavirus on the funding situation for special schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) also made a powerful speech about the impact of the pandemic on these services. I hope that the Minister, who has always had an open door with me, will respond positively to his request for a meeting.

As a mother of two young children, I know just how tough this pandemic and school closures have been on young people and their parents, but I simply cannot imagine how much harder it has been for those who have had their specialist support withdrawn. At the height of the third lockdown, just 16% of children with EHCPs were getting all the support set out in their plan, according to research by the Disabled Children's Partnership. Some 21% of parents said that their children were not getting any support set out in their EHCP. Remember that this is support to which the children are legally entitled, and which all too often represents a compromise that is below the level of support they actually need.

That is just children who have already secured EHCPs. Getting an appropriate EHCP in good time has unfortunately become a postcode lottery, after a decade of cuts to local government that have been felt unevenly across the country, not to mention the impact of the relaxations on timescales misguidedly introduced last April for assessing EHCPs. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) spoke movingly about the huge problem in getting EHCPs, drawing on her own experience of looking after a child with SEND. I appreciate her taking the time to contribute to this important debate.

As horrifying as some of the statistics are, the results are scarier. Half of the children with SEND have seen their conditions worsen this past year. I will focus specifically on the impact of loss of access to such therapies as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy, which a shocking 70% have been unable to do in recent months. Dan told us about his daughter Elisa, who has cerebral palsy. Elisa relies on regular physiotherapy from her education, health and care plan to manage her condition. Sadly, she missed out on that support for a year during the pandemic and her condition has worsened. My constituent Elisa has dystonia, a very uncomfortable condition where muscles contract uncontrollably. She can no longer use her wheelchair due to the worsening dystonia.

Then there is Suziie, my constituent who cares for her nephew, aged 11, who has a complex series of physical and neurological disabilities. During the pandemic, her nephew has been isolated from other children and has lost access to vital services and therapies that he needs to manage his condition. Awfully, he is now regressing and has lost vital abilities in communication and other essential life skills. He needs sensory rooms and hydrotherapy in his covid-19 recovery plan, and Suziie needs additional respite care.

Those heartbreaking cases tell a story about what has happened during the pandemic: a loss of support and declining health and social outcomes for children with SEND. As has been mentioned in the debate, the Women and Equalities Committee concludes that the Government's catch-up package will not be enough to tackle the disproportionate impacts on children with SEND. It is all very well issuing guidance saying that they will be a priority, but unless that is followed up with targeted funding there is no guarantee that they will get the support that they desperately need.

I have previously criticised Ministers for treating children as an afterthought in the pandemic, but I believe that those with SEND have been completely left behind. That is certainly how parents feel when I speak to them. However, not all politicians have forgotten about these children. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) highlighted the important work that Councillor Javed Hussain and other Luton councillors are doing on local autism hubs and park upgrades, bringing benefits for those who use wheelchairs. We should be learning from them.

Although lessons must be learned from the failures that my colleagues have outlined, I want to look to the future. We need proper support for EHCP provision to be restored in full. We need a plan from Ministers to clear the backlog of assessments and health appointments. There must be a proper co-ordinated catch-up plan that goes beyond the Government's narrow ideas about educational catch-up. We have to have targeted support for children with SEND to make up for months of lost development in communication, social skills and wellbeing.

Rather than downgrading the legal duties to children with SEND, as the Government did at the start of the pandemic, the SEND review should be an opportunity to upgrade the resources that local authorities have to deliver support, and to listen directly to families about how services can be reshaped so that they operate in the best interests of our young people.

3.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Vicky Ford): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I start by joining others in congratulating the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) on securing this important debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss this important topic of how we care for our children with special educational needs and disabilities. The Government are absolutely dedicated to supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families. Our ambition for them is the same as it is for every child and young person, which is to ensure that they have access to a world-class education that sets them up for life.

The covid-19 pandemic has been extremely challenging for many families of children and young people with SEND. That is why throughout this very difficult pandemic, including during periods of national restrictions, we asked schools and colleges to remain open for those with education, health and care plans, because we know that those pupils, students and their families can be disproportionately impacted by being out of education.

I am extremely proud that we have kept our schools and colleges open for those most vulnerable children. We were one of the very few countries in the world to do so during the first lockdown. I recognise that in that first lockdown, attendance in many cases was quite low, because people were concerned about those vulnerable children, who often have other underlying health conditions. We did not know very much at that time about the impact of the virus on children.

By the end of the most recent lockdown, 99% of special schools were open and about 46%—that is about half—of children with EHCPs were attending towards the end. In fact, 58% or nearly two out of three children with EHCPs in mainstream primary schools were attending.

Throughout the pandemic, I have had very many meetings with stakeholders and have listened carefully to feedback from organisations such as the Council for Disabled Children and home care organisations, from young people themselves and from their families. I have sent many open letters to families and those who support them to answer their questions and to give them guidance and updates.

I also made many virtual visits to special schools and colleges. Those have been invaluable, especially the visits I made last autumn term to many special schools in areas with high covid rates. People might remember that schools were expected to be open, but in some areas covid was high. Our special schools across the country are absolutely committed to ensuring that children and families continue to receive high-quality education and support. I am extremely grateful for all that they are doing and I am deeply inspired by their work.

Support has to go beyond education, however, and I am acutely aware of the pressures on families. That is why we prioritise respite care. Alongside that, we provided £40.8 million for the family fund last year, which supported more than 90,000 families on low incomes who were raising children with disabilities or serious illnesses. That included £13.5 million to respond to needs arising from the outbreak. It provided items such as specialist toys, IT and other elements of equipment.

When children are not able to attend face to face, they should still receive remote education. To support that, we invested nearly £5 million in the Oak National Academy, which included funding to provide the specialist content for pupils with SEND. We also founded the National Star College to provide specialist training for teachers, leaders and SENCOs—special educational needs co-ordinators—on providing remote education for pupils with SEND.

We have been clear that where children and young people with an EHC plan need health provision, educational settings should work collaboratively with local authorities and health providers to agree the appropriate support. We made it clear that therapists and other professionals may continue to visit schools and colleges to provide that. Indeed, yesterday I met the Royal College of Occupational Therapists and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists to underlie how important it is that children get those therapies.

Despite all our efforts, many children and young people with SEND will be negatively impacted by the pandemic, and our focus has to be on supporting them in our recovery. Sir Kevan Collins, who has great experience in the SEND sector, as well as in many other areas of education, has been appointed as the education recovery commissioner, and he is considering how we can effectively target resources and support for those in the greatest need.

Sir Kevan is also looking at transitions, which the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) mentioned. I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss that issue, but we may need to wait until after the court case. It is an issue that I shall be looking at closely. One clever thing that we did during the pandemic was to put in a special transition fund for year 11 students in alternative provision. Many young people in alternative provision have special educational needs, and that helped to support them on their journey into further education colleges last year. It was a great success. Transition is an issue that I am always interested in.

Vulnerable children are at the heart of our work in the Department for Education. The £650 million catch-up premium that we announced last June was weighted to give extra support to those in special schools. There is three times more support per pupil in special schools than in mainstream schools. That was supplemented by the additional £320 million recovery premium that we announced in March, which is helping schools to make up for lost teaching time. Head teachers decide how that premium is spent. They can prioritise particular pupils, including children with SEND.

Similarly, the recently expanded national tutoring programme provides access to high-quality tuition for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, and 26 of the 33 providers that we have approved to provide the tutoring can provide tutoring for SEND. That includes the 16 to 19 tuition fund, for the support of students. Furthermore, the early language and literacy catch-up programme will benefit all children, including those with SEND. More than 40% of the primary schools in the country have signed up to the language and literacy programme.

The long summer break can bring extra pressures on families, and to address that we have expanded the holiday activities and food programme, which has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged

[Vicky Ford]

children since 2018. This year it will cover the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays at a cost of up to £220 million and will be available to children across England. We are working to ensure that the programme is fully inclusive and accessible. The £200 million summer school funding will be available to all secondary schools, including specialist settings, to deliver face-to-face summer schools. Schools will be able to target what they provide based on pupils' needs, enabling them to tailor support for those with SEND.

The hon. Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) mentioned mental health, as did some other Members. It is important, because children and young people will succeed only if their physical and mental wellbeing is prioritised, so we recently announced another £79 million boost to children's and young people's mental health support, including through further roll-out of mental health support teams. Our wellbeing for education return programme has provided training and resources to help school staff across England to respond to the wellbeing and mental health needs of pupils at this time. On top of that, we remain committed to our joint Green Paper delivery programme on mental health.

Many Members have spoken about funding, and we recognise that support for SEND has to be underpinned by the necessary funding. In addition to the recovery funding, we are investing significantly in special needs education. An additional £730 million is going into high-needs funding in this financial year. That comes on top of the extra £780 million that we provided last year, which means that in two years the high-needs budget will have grown by more than £1.5 billion and increased by nearly a quarter. We are also investing another £300 million of capital funding this year in new places for children and young people with SEND, or those who need alternative provision.

It might be worth telling hon. Members how those funding numbers affect their constituencies. In Slough, the funding for high needs has increased to £28 million—a 16% increase over last year and this. There are also 16% increases in Bedford, Reading, Richmond and Camden. Funding in East Suffolk and Norfolk is increasing by about 22%, in Luton by 23% and in South Tyneside by about 26%. In Liverpool, funding was increased by 17% last year and will be increased by a further 12% this year.

As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) mentioned, we have been working closely with Richmond Council on safety valve funding, and I will pass her thanks on to the team at the Department for Education, who always work closely with councils that are struggling in this area. Luton also received almost another three quarters of a million pounds to improve children's social care.

We know that practical support for local SEND services is really important. This year we are putting £42 million into projects to support children and young people with SEND, ensuring that organisations across the country continue their work to strengthen local area performance, and supporting families and providing practical support to schools and colleges. Crucially, that funding will help to strengthen the participation of parents and young people, ensuring that they have a voice in designing SEND policies and services as well as access to high-quality information and support.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) mentioned autism. My Department is working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care to develop a refreshed cross-Government autism strategy. Progress has been made on autism over the years, but there are challenges and priorities for reducing inequalities, enabling autistic people of all ages to have the same opportunities as everyone else to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling lives. The refreshed autism strategy will, subject to the pressures of the pandemic, be published this spring—that is our aim.

The hon. Member for Slough mentioned local issues that he had seen. Slough Borough Council is Labour-run, and sadly it has a long history of failing children. Its children's services were rated as inadequate by Ofsted back in 2013, and we in the Department for Education took children's services into a trust. We have invested millions of pounds in that trust and, since 2019, the trust is no longer considered inadequate, though it still requires improvement and remains in intervention.

I was therefore very disappointed to hear the hon. Gentleman's stories about the services that Slough Borough Council provides for disabled children. Disabled children's services are the responsibility of the council; they do not sit within the children's trust. We have, however, provided support through a SEND adviser and increased the high-needs budget, as I mentioned. We know that the council's SEND services have not been inspected by the joint inspections that Ofsted does with the CQC. However, SEND inspections will recommence in 2021, so I am hopeful that we will see some more inspections and get more feedback.

I appreciate that Slough Borough Council has a significant dedicated schools grant deficit. I am pleased that it is keen to work with us to improve it, but I must point out to Members that it is possible to manage a high-needs budget and SEND services effectively. We can all learn from authorities that have had good inspection outcomes. Slough might like to look at what has been achieved in Portsmouth or indeed in Lambeth.

I turn to the SEND review. We do recognise that the current system is not delivering for some children and young people—it is not helping them to achieve the outcomes that they deserve. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) is right that we need a consistent approach across the whole country to ensure that children get the services and support that they need. Our cross-Government SEND review is looking at ways to improve that.

We know that these issues are long-standing and complex, but we are absolutely determined to deliver a real and lasting positive change. Our ambition is to publish proposals for wider public consultation before the summer. The review's work is broad: it covers children and young people from birth to the age of 25 and looks at improving lifelong outcomes. We want to build on the best of the current system and put families at its heart, which means ensuring that we identify and meet needs as soon as possible, including by having strong support systems within mainstream settings as well as excellence in special school settings.

I trust that this extensive programme of work makes it clear that supporting children and families, especially our most vulnerable children and children with special

needs and disabilities, is right at the heart of all that this Government do, especially in this very, very challenging time.

3.41 pm

Mr Dhesi: I thank the Minister for her response, and I thank all hon. Members for their excellent contributions to what I believe has been a very engaging and informative debate. I hope that parents and children with special educational needs and disabilities have appreciated just how seriously this important issue is being looked at by hon. Members across the political spectrum.

The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) eloquently explained the work undertaken by the all-party parliamentary group for special educational needs and disabilities, by its chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake), and by its other members. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) spoke powerfully about the barriers that children and their families in Norfolk face, and about the inherent unfairness of a two-tiered system. My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) spoke cogently about his concerns about the funding model and the devastation of that system in Bedford by austerity over the past decade. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) powerfully highlighted the issues that, as he put it, have been highlighted again and again over so many years—the pandemic has only exacerbated them, and yet we still have no solution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) described the incredible work of the late right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham, whose incredible input into work on autism I had the pleasure of learning about when I attended a training session on understanding autism at which she spoke so movingly. My hon. Friend has highlighted the exasperating delays; I felt that the delays in Slough were bad enough, but for her constituents to have to wait for up to four years is simply unacceptable. She also delineated at length the lack of joint working.

My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) spoke so movingly from her own experiences. As the mother of a child with special educational needs and disabilities, she knows all too well the pressures that families feel. She explained about the inability to access appointments, the gaps in the system and the lack of ring-fenced funding, which are issues that I hope the Minister will mend.

My Berkshire colleague and hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) highlighted the pressures on families in Reading. He spoke about the inadequate

funding; he also spoke with a great deal of experience, having seen it in his constituency, about the need to work on the transition from primary to secondary. I am grateful that the Minister has accepted his request to meet her in due course to alleviate some of those concerns about Reading.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) spoke about the pressures in Richmond Borough Council and how important it is to make children's needs, rather than funding, central. She also spoke about the isolation and huge mental health problems that children and their families face.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), the shadow Minister, spoke about the effect of issues in her constituency and about the national situation. She talked about her discussions with head teachers, who are not happy with the loss of support during the pandemic, and who say that the Government package will not be enough.

I am grateful to the Minister for her response. She accepted that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted families and children with special educational needs and disabilities. She described the situation in Slough, but the Slough trust solution imposed by the Government has not worked well; indeed, as Slough Borough Council and others have highlighted during discussions, the funding has been wholly inadequate. I hope the Minister will discuss that with her colleagues in the Department for Education to ensure that funding is available in the new settlement.

The Minister explained about the family fund, the catch-up and recovery premiums and the summer school funding. Although various numbers are bandied around whenever we have discussions with Government or approach them in the Chamber, as the Minister herself stated, the need has increased significantly but the funding has not kept pace. That is a central point.

As I said in my introductory speech, funding issues and delays are the key things on which we need action, as we all acknowledge. The Minister herself acknowledged that the current system is not working. I hope that the SEND review, which will be published this summer, will alleviate some of our concerns about funding and delays.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered support for children with SEND.

3.48 pm

Sitting suspended.

Electric Vehicles: Promotion

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

4.4 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered promotion of electric vehicle usage.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank the Minister for taking time to come and listen to the debate. I first refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Can you hear that? No, you cannot. That is the sound of an electric vehicle. Quiet, isn't it? Now breathe in through your nose—even those with masks on. Please breathe in, a big sniff. Can you smell anything? No. Again, there is nothing to smell. No nasty gases polluting the air we breathe; no noise polluting the sound of birds singing. Okay; we get the picture. It may be a little dramatic, but none the less it is all very true. That is our future, and it is not far away. In fact, if the Minister and the Government really want to, they can bring this vehicle revolution here within the next five years.

Now there is a stumbling block. Well, it is a few blocks that make a wall, but there really is only one wall now. You see, as time has moved on, so have the cars. Even as little as five years ago, electric cars were being produced but they were very expensive. Many listening to this debate may think that that is still the case. I am not going to tell you that they are cheap, but apparently the cost that makes a car affordable these days is around £36,000 and, thankfully, that is where we are today.

That is the lower end of the market, yes, and £36,000 is still a large amount of money, but it is at least comparable to a diesel or petrol vehicle. Many people buy these vehicles on personal contract purchase, so the actual capital cost is never paid in a lump sum, but rather as a deposit and a monthly figure which usually covers the depreciation. Electric cars tend to hold their money very well, so the monthly payments should be at least as competitive, if not better.

Electric cars are also phenomenally cheap to run. The average cost of a 100-mile journey in a diesel is £12; in an electric vehicle it is £7. Servicing costs are also much lower. With fewer moving parts, there is a lot less to go wrong. Most electric vehicles have fewer than 20 moving parts. Wherever you get moving parts, you get wear through friction. That usually means maintenance or failure, so it is obvious that the fewer the moving parts, the better. Electric vehicles brake through regeneration, too, so brake pad wear is minimal. With no exhaust, no oil to change, no filters—you get the picture.

If cost is not holding us back, what is? Is it distance? Again, that used to be the case. However, most electric vehicles do much more than 200 miles now, and although that can drop in the winter months as batteries and occupants need to be kept warm, most vehicles will easily do 130 miles. As the average journey in the UK is less than 10 miles, range is not the big issue any more.

I should like to take a minute to help everyone to recharge their electric vehicle. Electric vehicles are not like petrol or diesel vehicles, which a person would quite happily drive around with less than half a tank, and would definitely not fill up every day. However, with an electric vehicle, if you can, you should. There are two main reasons for that.

First, unlike with a petrol or diesel car, when your car is parked your EV will lose charge. That is because the batteries look after themselves with a slight amount of warmth, and there are lots of electronics that are always using power, so invariably you will lose around 1% a day. If you have to make an emergency journey or take a spontaneous day out—when we are not in lockdown—unless you are fully charged, you are not going. I think it was Elon Musk who said, ABC—always be charging. That is okay if you have a home charge unit, but if not, we need multiple fast-charging units everywhere.

Secondly, no one wants to wait three to four hours for their car to be charged, so the charging points need to be at least 60 kW, preferably 120 kW. Thirdly, I should mention the reliability of charge points; that is so important. Turning up to an EV station with a faulty or damaged unit is not fun, and unlike running out of fuel, a person cannot just call dad, as I know my daughter would, for a gallon of petrol. An electric vehicle just does not work like that—if you run out of charge, you are stuck—so charging points must be reliable.

Finally, the payment system for the charge points needs to be contactless. People need to be able to drive up, plug in, pay when ready and drive away. Contactless payment must be the way. The Government should work with stakeholders to ensure that contactless facilities are fitted to all new and existing charge points.

Those are the four stumbling blocks—the wall that is getting in the way of increased electric vehicle usage: the lack of charging points, the size of those points, their unreliability and the lack of contactless facilities. How can we overcome that wall?

Let me start by saying that we are trying—that is for sure. The announcement that no more internal combustion engines are to be registered after 2030 has definitely made the industry sit up and look at the issue more seriously. We are currently installing many charging points, but we need many more rapid units now. How can we do that?

We need to remove some of the existing incentives in the automobile sector and reinvest the money into EV charging point infrastructure. Currently, we are discounting cars and the cost of chargers at home and discounting vehicle excise duty and company car tax. Yet the cost of cars is falling, and will fall even more as the big auto companies such as Volkswagen, BMW and Ford start coming on board and producing more of their own electric vehicles.

The current voucher scheme for home charging is too complicated and does not really offer any huge savings to the end customer. Furthermore, as electric vehicles are becoming cheaper and cheaper to run, tax incentives will soon not be needed. If those moneys were redirected to further charging infrastructure projects, the automotive industry, which contributes much of our greenhouse gas emissions, could really lead the way to our net zero target.

Although I think the Government should change course slightly, I also thank the Minister for what they have done so far, and what they have already set out to do. The Government are investing £1.3 billion; £950 million of that is going directly into rapid charging projects. I know from my many meetings with stakeholders that the investment is more than welcome. The Government are investing a further £90 million into local EV charging

schemes, which local councils can apply for. The financing scheme is also a massive help and I hope that many businesses use it.

Some currently say that battery technology will get even better, while others stress that, while it will take time to get the charging points installed, they will come along eventually. I cannot stress how important it is that Ministers do not adopt that attitude, and instead move much more quickly. Why? It is obvious that fewer customers are buying electric vehicles due to that anxiety and the distance between charge points. That range anxiety is what is really stopping people buying these fantastic vehicles. The answer is to have high-powered rapid charging stations everywhere.

A 300-mile-range vehicle with a high-powered charging can take as little as 20 minutes to give in excess of 150 miles' charge. That is 75 miles in less than 10 minutes. That is obviously what we need—for EV charging points to be installed with the same frequency as petrol stations, well-lit and ideally under cover.

A perfect example is Gridserve in Essex. Its charging forecourt is clean, safe and has a lounge—not that it is really needed—shopping and a Costa Coffee. It has easy payment methods, too. Existing forecourt operators need to be taking this revolution seriously. With the Government's backing in the initial stage, it could be great for the customer and also profitable enough for the private sector to get involved and really push it forward.

I believe that the Government should taper off grants for home charging grant schemes by the end of the year, and do the same with electric car grants. Furthermore, we should look at the slow removal of company car tax benefits and vehicle excise duty benefits. With the savings made on removing those incentives, we should redirect the moneys into furthering the rapid charging network, so that anxiety is a thing of the past.

I also urge the Government to consider a proposal from Policy Exchange for a California-style zero-emission-vehicle mandate, which would require manufacturers to sell more electric or hydrogen vehicles each year. There should also be fines for companies that poorly maintain their charging points, and contactless payment must be mandatory. If we do that, the take-up of such vehicles will be huge.

I want to mention a final issue, on which I hope to secure a debate later in the year: artificial intelligence. With electric vehicles, the public are seeing the power of artificial intelligence. I am talking about self-driving cars. This is the first real step into the future, and none of us really understands it, so I make one further ask: will the Minister discuss the effects of AI with all her colleagues as a matter of urgency? I believe that there will be many benefits from AI over the years to come, but unless it is regulated now, the positive effects might be far outweighed by the negative effects that AI has on society.

One final time: can you hear that, Sir Edward? No. Well, that is an electric vehicle.

4.15 pm

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) on securing the debate, and thank him for allowing me to contribute as well.

This is an important and timely debate, given the Government's recent climate change commitments and the transport decarbonisation plan that is expected later this spring. In the EV conversation we rightly focus on battery electric, as my hon. Friend already has, but as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on hydrogen, I say that we must not forget the role that fuel-cell electric can play in supporting our net zero targets. Such technology is powered by hydrogen and rapidly improves air quality, as it produces no carbon emissions. Indeed, the only waste from a hydrogen electric vehicle is water.

Hyundai anticipates that 10,000 NEXOs on the road would have a carbon reduction effect equivalent to planting 60,000 trees. The key benefit of hydrogen electric, compared with battery electric, is the consumer continuity by way of shorter recharging times and extended range, ending the road rage that my hon. Friend spoke about. On a five-minute charge, these types of cars can travel more than 400 miles, which is equivalent to any petrol or diesel car. However, the biggest barrier to these vehicles, and to those that are battery electric, is cost. We need to provide an answer to that. How can someone on a low income who drives a five or 10 year-old petrol car be convinced to switch to a zero-carbon vehicle? Net zero can be achieved only if it is accessible for everyone, so those of us who want to see a reduction in our emissions will need to answer that.

Beyond hydrogen electric cars, the most important role that fuel cells will play is in helping decarbonise our larger road transport, particularly buses and heavy goods vehicles. In 2015, the Government backed the groundbreaking Aberdeen bus project, introducing 10 hydrogen buses in Aberdeen. At the time it was the largest hydrogen bus fleet in Europe. Fast-forward five years and, according to the UK Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Association, there are over 7,000 fuel cell buses and commercial vehicles already operating globally, including almost 100 fuel-cell buses in the UK. That will be further boosted by the Government's recent announcement of more than £10 million investment in hydrogen bus manufacturing in Northern Ireland. We are investing in greener trains, with hydrogen trains coming to Teesside tracks in the not-too-distant future; in greener shipping, with £20 million for clean maritime competition; and in greener flying, with the Jet Zero Council. I know that fuel cells will play an important part in all of that.

If I could ask the Minister to look at one area further, it would be how we can use hydrogen fuel cells in emergency service vehicles. Police stations, fire stations and hospitals often have a lot of associated land that would be perfect for the production and storage of hydrogen, converting our ambulances and fire engines to low carbon, with the added benefit of shorter refuelling times and extended range. The market is growing, and this provides an exciting opportunity to potentially support thousands of green jobs in the UK. Hydrogen will be one of the key ways that we level up the whole of the United Kingdom, and I am grateful to the Government for recognising the role that Redcar and Cleveland can play in that. I am proud that Teesside is building the UK's first hydrogen transport hub.

If we are to meet our climate target and scale up demand for electric vehicles, we must also ensure that we realise the full potential of fuel-cell electric vehicles. That requires ensuring that the right infrastructure is in place to provide long-term certainty in order to attract

[*Jacob Young*]

investment opportunities. From speaking to businesses operating in the sector, I know that they are ready to scale up and meet the demand going forward. We can achieve that by including hydrogen refuelling station infrastructure in future funding schemes, supporting hydrogen refuelling stations and further incentivising the public to take up these zero-emission vehicles. My hope is that we continue to lead the way as a global frontrunner in clean energy and net zero transport. With the right infrastructure, investment in place and support for those who need it, I am certain that our transport system will build back not only better, but greener too.

4.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for securing this important debate on the promotion of electric vehicle usage. Like him, I am a passionate and keen electric vehicle driver and enjoy the peace and quiet and the clean experience it brings me. I very much welcome the opportunity to set out what the Government are doing on this important agenda.

The transition to zero-emission vehicles is critical, as my hon. Friend said, in helping us to meet our climate change obligations and in improving air quality in our towns and cities. That is why we are going further and faster to decarbonise transport by phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030; from 2035, all new cars and vans must be zero-emission at the tailpipe, putting us on course to be the fastest nation in the G7 to decarbonise cars and vans. On the back of the further announcement from the Prime Minister yesterday about our accelerated carbon targets, it is clear that we are playing a world-leading role in the fight against climate change under this Conservative Government.

I thank my hon. Friend for rightly pointing out all the positives of owning an electric vehicle. It is right that, overall, they are cheaper to run than the equivalent petrol and diesel car. He is also correct that range anxiety should be, and in most cases is, a concern of the past: in fact, 99% of car trips are less than 100 miles, and many of the latest electric vehicles can travel more than 200 miles on a single charge. For example, the Volkswagen ID.3 Pro has a 263-mile range, enough to drive from Westminster to my hon. Friend's constituency, Don Valley, with 100 miles to spare—maybe stopping off in Gainsborough as well, Sir Edward.

My hon. Friend is also right to point to the stumbling blocks. I will start with the lack of rapid chargers. He pointed out that the Government are providing £1.3 billion to accelerate the roll-out of charge points on motorways and major A roads, in homes and businesses and on streets. That is part of an overall package of £2.8 billion to support industry as a whole and consumers to make the switch to electric vehicle motoring.

The UK is already a global front-runner in supporting provision of charging infrastructure. Government and industry have supported the installation of nearly 20,800 public charging devices, including nearly 3,900 rapid devices—one of the largest networks in Europe. In my hon. Friend's own region of Yorkshire and the Humber, there are more than 1,000 publicly available charging

devices, 311 of which are rapid devices. In England, a driver is never more than 25 miles away from a rapid charge point anywhere along England's motorways and major A roads. However, I totally agree with my hon. Friend that there is much more to do, and we will come forward with a number of plans and announcements on our infrastructure strategy to deliver the charge points that we need to underpin this transition.

I agree furthermore with my hon. Friend that rapid charging is key to increasing the confidence in electric vehicles. Thanks to the Government and private sector working together, there are rapid and ultra-rapid charge points across 97% of motorway service areas in England, but we are ramping up this provision. We expect all motorway service stations to have at least six 150kW chargers by 2023, backed by investment from this Conservative Government, which means that someone should be able to charge their rapid charging-enabled car in the time it takes to get a cup of coffee, just as we would now with an internal-combustion-engine car.

It is important to recognise that slower forms of charging are important as well. Customers value the choice and flexibility to charge their vehicles at different speeds in different locations, such as overnight at home, at work or when they go shopping. I love the fact that I can go to sleep while my vehicle is charging and it is fully charged and ready to go when I wake up in the morning.

We have a comprehensive strategy to support the roll-out of charging. In addition to the £50 million we have made available this year for home and workplace charging schemes, we are proposing a number of important changes. We are refocusing our electric vehicle home charge scheme to support people living in rented and leasehold accommodation, which will level up our infrastructure roll-out. Our workplace charging scheme will be opened up to small and medium-sized enterprises and the charity sector.

We know that charging for people without off-street parking is a massively important issue. I encourage all parliamentary colleagues listening to this debate to speak to their local authorities and encourage them to apply, if they have not done so already, to our £20 million on-street residential charging fund, which was doubled last year by the Transport Secretary.

My information is that no local authority in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley has applied for this funding, so I encourage him to speak to his colleagues and co-workers at his local authority so they can apply for that funding, which could benefit residents. The money has been made available; it is down to local authorities to work with the Government and get the charging infrastructure where it needs to be.

The purpose of that scheme is to increase the availability of on-street charging points in residential streets, where off-street parking is not available. Many people live in homes and streets of this type. Some 75% of the capital cost of procuring and installing charge points is covered by central Government, and the Government provide free, impartial advice through a number of sources; I am happy to direct my hon. Friend to that.

I move on to the valid point that he raised about contactless payments at charge points. We agree with him that the experience needs to improve. We recently held a consultation to make payments easier, charge

points more reliable and pricing more transparent, and to ensure that the data is open and accessible. We will come forward with a response to that and lay regulations on those topics in autumn 2021, parliamentary scheduling permitting.

Let me set out the Government's position on the vehicle grants that my hon. Friend raised. Many of these matters are for the Treasury, as he knows. As we first signalled in 2018, our intention is to move away from grants as the market matures. We have refocused our vehicle grants to target the more affordable end of the market, where we know most consumers will be looking and where taxpayers' money will make the most difference. In response to that, many manufacturers have reduced the prices of their vehicles. For example, BMW have dropped the price of their i3S by almost £7,500, which is a great win for consumers.

Our grants are working. In 2020, battery electric vehicles made up 6.6% of the new car market. Since 2011, our plug-in grants have supported 300,000 ultra low emission vehicles. We have committed a further £582 million to support vehicle grants, so we do see our grants having a long-term role to play, alongside other support, although we will continue to keep all these policies under review.

I turn now to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young). I thank him for raising the vital subject of hydrogen and the role of fuel cell vehicles in the transition to zero-emission motoring. As he knows, our ambitions for delivering greener transport are technology neutral. We believe that a range of zero-emission transport technologies will be adopted in the future. He highlighted a number of Government plans and projects that have supported hydrogen vehicles of all types already.

I put on the record my grateful thanks to him for the role he has played in securing the first hydrogen for transport hub, which is in his area of Tees Valley. It has come with £3 million worth of funding, to enable exactly the things that he describes and enable hydrogen for transport to develop alongside its application in the industrial, energy and other sectors of the economy. We are pushing ahead with plans for the hub. It is a world-leading project, and we believe it will set out a vision for the role that hydrogen can play in transport. I am very excited to see that progressing.

In the last couple of moments, Sir Edward, I refer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar about artificial intelligence and driverless cars. He is right to mention that as we do not get to talk about the subject often enough, so I thank him for bringing it up. He mentions the exciting progress we have made in self-driving vehicles in this country, and the importance of understanding this new technology and its impact on society.

I believe self-driving vehicles have the potential to make journeys greener, safer, easier and more reliable. We have the opportunity to bring vast economic benefits

to our country, by creating an industry and building on our existing world-leading expertise in automotive and engineering. The industry could be worth billions of pounds and could generate thousands of well-paid skilled jobs. As my hon. Friend knows very well, this Government's intention is to build back greener, creating well-paid jobs in the industries of the future, and driving a green industrial recovery.

The introduction of self-driving vehicles to UK roads is closer than many would think. We are currently considering whether vehicles equipped with the new automated lane keeping system technology, which could enter the British market as early as the end of this year, can be legally defined as "self-driving". *[Interruption.]* I hope you can hear me, Sir Edward.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I can hear you perfectly.

Rachel Maclean: Great; I will continue. It is essential that the introduction of self-driving vehicles be supported by appropriate safety and legal frameworks. The UK has published three world-leading consultation papers on a comprehensive safety and regulatory framework for self-driving vehicles, led by the Law Commission. The final recommendations from the Law Commission are due by the end of this year, and I will be discussing them carefully with my colleagues across Government.

That is all part of the Government's effort to make the UK the best place in the world to deploy and develop self-driving vehicles, which must, of course, be safe. The questions of safety and the role that artificial intelligence can play are at the forefront of my mind as a Minister in the Department for Transport.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley for this excellent opportunity to set out some of the work that we are doing in Government to promote electric vehicle usage across all parts of the UK. I agree that we need to take ambitious steps to scale up this exciting transition, for both electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles and hydrogen in all its forms. I assure him that we are not sitting back and letting this happen; we are actively pushing forward a number of strategies, including the transport decarbonisation plan, which is to be published later this spring and will set out a lot more detail.

With that, Sir Edward, I conclude my remarks and welcome the quiet, which sounds exactly like an electric vehicle driving.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): They are certainly quieter than the House of Commons Division bell.

Question put and agreed to.

4.32 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

Stroke: Aftercare

4.57 pm

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the National Stroke Programme and aftercare and rehabilitation services for stroke patients.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and bring this debate to Westminster Hall. It is an important topic in which, as will become apparent, I have a personal interest. However, it is worth setting out the national significance of stroke and in particular stroke aftercare, because over recent years we have made huge advances in public awareness of the symptoms of stroke—the messages to look out for the signs of it, and to get urgent help, have cut through. The acute treatment of stroke has vastly improved, and many more people, thank heavens, are able to survive it. All those are good things. There have been real advances in medical science and technology in that regard.

The area where, I am sorry to say, we lag behind is what happens next. The NHS is brilliant at lifesaving and acute work, but it is in the follow-up for those who survive stroke and are left with the consequences where, it seems to me, we have more to do. In this debate, I want to concentrate on that and draw it to the attention of the House—and, I hope, to the attention of the wider public too.

I mentioned that I had a personal interest in this, Sir Edward. As some hon. Members may know, in July 2019 my wife, Ann-Louise, suffered a severe stroke—15 on the national stroke scale. We were fortunate that we had brilliant acute treatment at the Princess Royal University Hospital in Bromley and some good aftercare. She came through, but the truth is that she was left with a number of impairments thereafter because of the position of the stroke. Like so many stroke survivors I have met since, she continues to fight bravely and determinedly to come back from the stroke, and to get back to where she wants to be. It can be done, but it is a long and hard road. It requires courage and patience, but also consistent professional support, and it is that last thing that I think we need to do more to achieve.

In our case, Ann-Louise was unconscious for about three days. We were fortunate that the Princess Royal University Hospital at Farnborough Common is a regional centre of excellence, as part of the King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, and therefore she received superb treatment. However, she of course needed rehabilitation, which she received at the Ontario unit of Orpington Hospital, again provided by excellent and dedicated people.

However, the sad truth was that the unit was not resourced to deliver the level of consistent rehabilitation that it would wish to provide for Ann-Louise and other patients. For example, during the several weeks she spent there, it was not possible to deliver the therapies per week to the level set out in the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence clinical guidelines. I am sorry to say that is by no means an unusual state of affairs.

Frankly, there was a difficulty with the availability of therapists because of an inability to cover maternity leave, sick leave and so on, and there were shortages, particularly of speech and language therapists. It was

never possible for Ann-Louise or the other patients to consistently receive the hours for five days a week that are set out in the NICE guidelines.

In the end, we were able to get private treatment and private rehabilitation for Ann-Louise at the Wellington Hospital in London. Again, dedicated people did great work there. However, the truth is that many families are not in a position to do that. I was very struck by one lady who was in the same bay as Ann-Louise in Orpington Hospital. She was only in her mid-40s, I think. She had a 16-year-old daughter and the consequences of the stroke that she suffered were much more severe than those of Ann-Louise's stroke. She was there when we arrived and she was still there when we left, and frankly it was not possible to see any significant improvement in her condition. It is for people like her that one worries even more, because they are not in a position to seek some of the help that we were able to seek.

Ann-Louise eventually came home the day after the general election in 2019, so we are talking about a period of some weeks. As people may know, she was then entitled to a measure of aftercare in the community—it works out at about six weeks of occupational physiotherapy, and speech and language therapy—but thereafter it stops. I think that what we manage to do very often is to get people fit enough to be discharged back to their home, and to establish themselves initially at home. However, I do not think that we deliver on what is recognised by all the clinicians and well set out by the Stroke Association and others—consistent, long-term, programmed care over a longer period of time. That is what we want to see, and it is what is envisaged in the various programmes and plans that the Department of Health and Social Care has put in place for stroke. I think that is the area that we need to draw attention to.

After a period of time in our trust, which is a well-run trust, in effect one bids for further speech and language therapy. After another period and after a referral, hopefully one will get about three sessions, spread over a number of weeks. If targets are met, one may be in a position to seek a referral for perhaps three further sessions. However, if some of the targets are not met, and not everyone can meet them the first time around, then, because the resources are limited, very often that therapy will stop. That does not seem to me to be right or fair to people who are working terribly hard to come back from a life-changing experience.

Therefore, although there are dedicated professionals—nothing I say is to take away from the dedication of the professionals involved—we are not delivering on what we set out to do. That is a tragedy, because two-thirds of stroke survivors leave hospital with a disability. Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability in the UK. It affects about 1.2 million people in this country. Nearly 100,000 strokes happen in the course of a year. It is therefore a major issue, which needs to be addressed.

We have had in the past a national stroke strategy. There is a stroke plan, as part of the national plan. And now being developed—it is the subject of this debate—is a national stroke programme. All those plans and strategies are laudable but, as I have said, we are not actually able to deliver consistently on the targets that are set out in them, and if we cannot meet what is in the current plans, the concern is how we will meet the more ambitious targets for much more integrated stroke care that are set out in the strategy beyond that.

What we are looking at, according to all the clinicians whom I have talked to over the past 18 months or more, is really this: we have to provide effective support and rehabilitation. A lot of people think, and there is of course some evidence, that improvements are made in the first few weeks and months. Those weeks and months are critical, but there is also growing evidence that people can continue to improve, and improve significantly, beyond that, and actually we can find improvements going on over a number of years. But for people to achieve that, they must have the support.

Stroke is not a simple type of brain injury, which is essentially what it is. It varies according to the severity, where in the brain it has occurred and many other factors, and it will have varying consequences for each individual. Therefore, if we are truly to enable people to recover from stroke, they must have a personalised programme of care, rehabilitation and support, and that must be long term. Long-term personalised care is essential, but at the moment that is not happening. Sadly, the Stroke Association research suggests that some 45% of stroke survivors feel abandoned after their stroke. What is important in that context is not just the physical consequences of stroke; there are real psychological consequences as well, because it is life-changing.

My wife was a professional opera singer and a director of music at her local school. One can imagine what it has been like for her to have an impairment of speech; it weighs immensely heavily. We have met many other people who have had things that have, in effect, changed the nature of who they are. If they are to get back to who they are and can be, they need the really significant help that I have described, but they also need help with morale and the psychological impacts that there can be. That is one of the areas in which we have not been able to deliver to the level that our aspirations set out.

We are to move to the integrated national stroke service model. I am told that it is to be published imminently, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will update us on that. Can we know when that is signed off? Can we know when it will come into force? If there are to be pilot schemes, where will they be? How long will that take to happen? What resourcing will be made available to support that integrated strategy? What is the plan to seek to recruit more specialist therapists, from all the disciplines, to stand behind it? All those are things that we need to have, and I hope that the Minister will be able to help us on that. Otherwise, the danger is that it becomes an aspiration, rather than a reality, for stroke survivors and their families.

Clearly, early supported discharge and integrated community stroke services are the aspiration, but at the moment, in an area such as mine, people will find that some services are provided through the hospitals. If people have more than one impairment, they may have to go to different hospitals—some for ocular work, some for vocal rehabilitation and some for physical rehabilitation. Some services will be provided through the GP, the networks and the clinical commissioning group—in Bromley, we have Bromley Healthcare, which does an excellent job—but others will be provided through a different hospital trust or health trust under contract; yet others will be provided through the local authority, social services and sometimes charities and voluntary groups. We have several stroke clubs and stroke groups

in our area that do great work—the voluntary sector is amazing—but we cannot and should not depend on them to deliver part of the core service.

That is quite a minefield to negotiate. If it is difficult to negotiate for a professional family such as ours, think how difficult it is for people who may not have the resource and experience of the system, if I may put it that way, that we and others in our position have to fall back on. Pulling things together meaningfully, so that there is almost a one-stop shop that people can go to as a single point of reference and where they can call in expertise, seems to me and many experts in the field to be critical.

I referred to the importance of psychological rehabilitation. The psychologists I have met believe that much more needs to be done. I also referred to the importance of meeting our targets and the difficulties in some areas, such as speech and language therapy. For speech and language therapy nationally, the figures for meeting the NICE stroke guideline of

“45 minutes of each relevant...therapy for...5 days per week”

stand at 55.2%—just over half—and in some places they fall below that. There is a huge amount more to do on that issue, and a deal more also seems to be required in supporting early discharge. The proportion of patients treated by a stroke-skilled early discharge team nationally is 41%, and in some trusts the percentage drops into single figures. That is just not acceptable, as I know the Minister will recognise. What are we going to do to get those numbers up, so that we can move on to the next stage securely?

We need to think longer-term about this. We had the great good fortune to be introduced to the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery at Queen Square in London, which does amazing work. One programme there, an intensive aphasia course, is headed up by Professor Alex Leff. It is really full on, but that proves the point—this is one of the things that our current system does not deliver—that rehabilitation has the best outcomes when it is very intensive. Spreading it out to an hour one week, an hour the next and maybe another hour in two or three weeks does not come anywhere near to delivering the level of intensity necessary to enable stroke survivors to relearn skills for the neuroplasticity that is so important for recovery of the brain to kick in. Frequent use, repetition and intensity of the therapy is so critical.

That programme is funded as part of a research project, but as far as I know it is the only one of its kind in the country. That does not seem fair. If it is that good and well documented—it is; I have seen it—surely we should seek to roll out that type of intensive treatment across the piece. Somebody should not have to go privately to get the intensiveness necessary for their loved ones to get the level of recovery that they can achieve. I hope that we can look at that, too.

I hope that that is a start to the debate. We have an hour, and I know that several hon. Members wish to participate—I am grateful to them for coming—so I hope that I have set the scene. I look forward to the Minister's response, but I hope that once we have considered the debate we will not leave it at that. We could have a greater awareness of the topic in Parliament—I was struck by how little debate there has been in the House and how few questions have been asked on it. When I

[*Sir Robert Neill*]

looked at the list of all-party parliamentary groups, I noticed that there is no group on stroke, although there are groups on very many other serious, life-threatening and life-changing conditions. Perhaps that is a call for hon. Members who might be interested to think about the subject and keep it in mind as parliamentarians.

Having opened the debate, I will perhaps leave it there. I might say something at the end after the Minister has finished, but I have endeavoured to stress the importance of this, because it does change lives. People with the right support can come back. So much can be got back. There is always hope afterwards, and if people have the support to achieve that hope, they can restore their lives in huge measure. It is surely our responsibility as a society to enable them properly, with the aid of the skilled clinicians that we have, to do just that.

5.15 pm

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) on securing this important debate and, in doing so, helping to shine a light on the need for greater funding for our stroke services. I associate myself with his earlier comments about a one-stop shop for support for patients and families who have suffered from strokes. I also pay tribute to the work of the Stroke Association, which has done so much to tackle this issue, including vital research and support for survivors of strokes, as well as its core role alongside NHS England in delivering our national programme.

I am proud that my local hospital, Stepping Hill, has consistently been recognised for its stroke provision. Since 2015, Stepping Hill's stroke unit has been rated the best in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on three occasions in a report compiled by the Royal College of Physicians. There are many other charities and organisations that play an important part in providing support within our communities, including Stroke Information in my constituency of Stockport, run by Nick Clarke, who set up that organisation almost a decade ago.

In England, one in six people will have a stroke in their lifetime. New statistics released by Public Health England reveal that roughly 57,000 people each year suffer their first stroke. Unfortunately, the trauma does not end there for many survivors, with around 30% of people going on to experience another stroke. Strokes are a leading cause of death and disability in the UK, and there are around 32,000 stroke-related deaths in England alone each year. Although many associate the condition with older people, Public Health England research has shown that almost 40% of first-time strokes occur in middle-aged adults—as in, those between the ages of 40 and 69.

Furthermore, the average age for a stroke has fallen by three years over the past decade and, worryingly, most first-time strokes are now occurring at an earlier age than at the same stage 10 years ago. It is highly likely, therefore, that colleagues taking part in the debate will know someone who has been affected by this condition. Indeed, a close friend of mine suffered a major stroke last year, so this is an issue close to my heart. I am

pleased that he has made a full recovery, with the incredible care and support of our NHS. My special thanks go to the entire team at Salford Royal Hospital for looking after him.

Despite the ever-present threat of strokes, the reality is that for many years research has been underfunded in comparison with other devastating and debilitating conditions such as cancer. In 2016, research by the Stroke Association revealed that just £48 is spent on stroke research per patient compared with £241 on cancer research. We need more funding for both those serious conditions. The already challenging situation has now been compounded by the devastation that the covid pandemic has had on many charities' fundraising capabilities, meaning that millions of pounds have been lost. That has reduced their ability to continue their work and carry out critical research.

Strokes are incredibly prevalent in the UK, with one striking every five minutes, meaning that it is a leading cause of adult disability. It is therefore vital that sufficient funding is in place not only to research the causes behind the condition and help to identify preventative measures, but to support our national stroke programme, including the aftercare and rehabilitation services.

Research such as the recent study announced by the Stroke Association—the largest of its kind in the world—to investigate a possible link between covid-19 and life-threatening strokes is crucial. In particular, the report states that stroke patients who have had coronavirus may be younger and experience more severe effects of the stroke as a result, including death. It is an incredibly timely and important study that will need to be supported, given that the charity's own research director said that the research was

“just the tip of the iceberg.”

Now more than ever, the national stroke programme needs to be given the support and funding that it requires to ensure that it can continue its vital work and deal with the rising number of cases in the UK. I therefore urge the Minister to do all she can to look again at this issue and to push her Department to ensure that the national stroke programme and associated aftercare and rehabilitation services receive increased funding that will help to meet both existing and growing demand on NHS stroke provision.

5.19 pm

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) for securing this important debate.

North Norfolk, I believe, had the highest incidence of strokes in the UK in 2019. I imagine that even on more recent data, that statistic has not improved a great deal. But why? We have the oldest constituency demographics in the country and, as we all know, stroke prevalence increases with age. That, however, is not the only issue. Our rural and isolated communities in North Norfolk, where many elderly people live, suffer from dreadfully slow ambulance response times. In the beautiful, picturesque area of Wells-next-the-Sea, we have the worst response times in the entire country.

Making a recovery from a stroke is all about getting that speed of treatment. There is no point having all the care in place if we simply cannot reach our residents in anything like a timely fashion. Early treatment not only

saves lives, but results in that greater chance of recovery, as well as the likely reduction in permanent disability from a stroke.

We continue to work hard in North Norfolk, in particular on the local ambulance response time work group, to get patients to hospital in time for thrombolysis treatment, but it must get even better. Encouragingly, we have seen a research trial by the East of England Ambulance Service Trust, using a stroke ambulance which can scan and start thrombolysis if necessary. In rural and hard-to-reach areas, why can we not roll that out even further?

Even in 2021, there are about 100,000 strokes a year. It is a devastating and cruel condition. In July 2019, my stepfather, who was entirely my inspiration to become an MP, suffered a devastating stroke. To everyone who met him, he was a tower of energy, who shaped the community around him for some 45 years as a leading businessman in our close community of North Norfolk. Within a week of suffering a stroke, however, he passed away. I paid tribute to him in my maiden speech, wishing he could have been present to support me in this place. Instead, he passed just five months before we ever got to share that moment. That is exactly why I take such an interest in this debate.

My story is not unique. We need to do more to stop this happening again, and I think that we can. It is about investment in prevention, treatment and care. In my constituency and, I am sure, in many other rural areas, it would be achievable to invest in more early diagnosis and treatment. We need good prevention, so that TIAs—transient ischaemic attacks—and blood clots can be spotted early. We have to be proactive. In turn, of course, that pays for itself, because early prevention lessens the load on the NHS.

The two main issues that we have in Norfolk remain the lack of thrombectomy services and the unequal provision of post-stroke care and support, in particular affecting my constituents in North Norfolk. I have campaigned for more services at Cromer Hospital—an early diagnosis ward would help enormously—but such services could be improved in so many of our community hospitals throughout the country. There is simply little point in my constituency having an ambulance that will take more than an hour to get to Norwich. We have to put in place the processes and procedures to treat in that precious golden hour in which recovery chances are so improved. I understand that Cambridge is to receive a mechanical thrombectomy trial—why not Norwich?

I would love to see real investment in physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy for early supported discharge. A lot of encouraging work is under way nationally, in the national stroke programme and in the rehabilitation space, and I thank the Minister for that. I hope that the suggestions in this debate will be helpful and driven forward, so that we may level up pockets of the country where people are behind the curve to ensure that everyone has the same level of success after suffering a stroke.

5.24 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, Sir Edward, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) on securing it. I can remember when he requested

the debate during business questions—I believe it was in January—so it is good to know that the system works. We have in place two of the participants in a Westminster Hall debate on heart valves, which I think was held on a Thursday in February. This Minister responded, and the shadow Minister also made a significant contribution. I do not want to pre-empt what the Minister will say, but I think the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst will be pleased with the response, because she certainly gave me a good response to my debate on heart valves. We will take the Minister up on her invitation for the all-party parliamentary group to speak to her about these matters.

This is an issue that has become very real for me, although probably not as real as it is for the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker), and for people whom I know who have had a stroke. Over a period of time, I have been greatly encouraged by those who have improved. Some improve almost back to where they were—about 80% to 85%—and others not as well, which is probably to do with age and the severity of the stroke.

I want to make three quick points to the Minister, and I am quite sure that the reply will be positive and helpful. I believe there is a need to increase the availability of clot-removing treatment—thrombectomy—to enable all hospitals to carry out the procedure. We should have a target of delivering a tenfold increase in the proportion of patients who receive a clot-removing thrombectomy in order to end their strokes, so that 1,600 more people can be independent after a stroke each year. If we are to do that in reality, we have to address some of the reasons why strokes happen. Perhaps our health conditions have not been as good as they should have been, and it is about improving people's health. Can the Minister tell us what has been done to deliver that across every region?

Back home in Northern Ireland—I presume it is the probably the same here—we have regular adverts. Chest, Heart & Stroke has an advert on UTV that tells people what to watch out for, and it is really helpful. Can the Minister confirm whether the mainland has the same number of adverts? They tell people what to look out for. To take up the point made by the hon. Member for North Norfolk, time is of the essence when someone has a stroke. It is what people do in those minutes afterwards, regardless of whether they have the qualifications or just want to do something that helps, because time is absolutely critical.

I recently watched something on TV. It was a clip of a darts match in which a player is having a stroke. His face distorts, and he loses all power in his arm. Seeing that take place in real time has shocked me, because it really brought home the issue that pertains to those who have had a stroke, as well as what can be done in that short time. We need to incorporate a greater awareness of the warning signs. Getting help quickly makes the difference between a fast recovery and a slow one. Can the Minister tell us what has been done to raise awareness among the general public?

I said that I know people who have had strokes and who have recovered quite well. Indeed, a friend of mine had one a while ago and is now back to almost 95%. It is incredible that someone can have a stroke and recover so quickly. In Northern Ireland, over a third of strokes happen to people over the age of 69, and 50% to people over the age of 60. However, it is not uncommon,

[Jim Shannon]

unusual or unique for those under that age to have a stroke. What has been done among all those groups? Those who are most at risk must be aware of the signs and symptoms.

The hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst was absolutely right to refer to long-term personalised care. I am asking things that have perhaps been asked before, but I am quite sure that the Minister will be able to reiterate and to assure us on that, and on the national stroke programme and the lessons learned and the changes that can provide better protection, raise awareness and ensure that we improve health for everyone in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I know that the Minister has no responsibility for Northern Ireland, but I look to her, as always, for a response to the queries we have all put forward. It is important, not only for me, as my party's spokesperson on health issues, but for all of us to know that we are improving long-term care and help following strokes for those who need it.

5.30 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Thank you for calling me, Sir Edward. I extend my gratitude to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) and wish his wife well on her stroke journey. I was a physio in the NHS for 20 years and worked in stroke rehabilitation, so I obviously know this issue well from a practitioner's point of view. I echo much of what I have heard in the debate as the reality of clinical practice. During the course of the debate, about 12 more people in the UK will have had a stroke, which is why urgency in getting things right is so important.

Public health measures are absolutely crucial, because smoking and poor diet and exercise contribute extensively to the risk of having stroke. Above and beyond that, once somebody has entered that journey, we need to make sure that they get the optimum care. In acute care, thrombectomy processes are improving people's chances of good recovery, which is fantastic, but a significant postcode lottery still loiters around that, which we have to address.

My first question to the Minister is therefore whether, as the NHS goes through significant change over the next couple of years, integrated care systems will be charged to set up their own clinical networks for strokes and to ensure that they have the specialism for that acute phase of stroke placed in each one and also spread through the network. It is really important that we bring this to the fore, and that, as the NHS changes, we make sure that the right services are in place.

All too often, as patients were discharged from my care, I would fret about where they went. If they went to a specialist rehabilitation centre, I knew that all would be well, but if they went to a more generalist step-down facility, or were discharged into the community, without that specialist input—speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, clinical psychology as well as neuro physio—I would worry. It is a specialism in and of itself; indeed, neuro physio diverts into stroke rehab. Making sure that people have the up-to-date specialist skills makes all the difference. They take a long time to train, but they change the way somebody with a stroke is approached.

One challenge I always found was the pressure to get people out the hospital door and discharged quickly. To actually re-educate somebody's mind and body to synchronise and work together in a new way takes time, and therefore ensuring that there is that investment in time is really important. We also cannot push somebody because they become tired, so we have this really delicate balancing act of timing.

It is different for absolutely every patient, but as they go through that journey, they need that specialist support. I will give an example. They may be discharged home, but we know that so many people, once they go home, will just sit in a chair, as opposed to carrying on their rehabilitation. Or perhaps, even when getting up from the chair, they will take the short cut of pulling themselves up, increasing their muscle tone, which is detrimental, as opposed to, say, using a proper Bobath method of facilitating their muscles. That makes a real difference how this issue is approached, and therefore the paucity of stroke rehab specialists must be addressed, making sure that that skill mix is there, but also with the right level of training. That is crucial.

I ask for more training around stroke rehab for GPs and in the community in particular. A community physio may deal with respiratory patients, musculoskeletal patients, neuro patients. We want neuro physios in the community through an extension of specialist rehab centres moving into the community while keeping that clinical case load. We also want the same clinicians along a patient's rehab journey. It is not easy for clinicians to relay information about a patient simply, so following them into the community could be a different way of doing that as opposed to the silos of our institutions that we currently see.

One other thing is really important. We know that stroke is for life, and therefore we need to ensure that the services are there for a substantial amount of time. I have raised the issue of the six-month review, which is far too long to wait—an individual may plateau or even regress in their care. Regular intervention is really needed and, if someone has plateaued or regressed when they could have been progressing, they should be brought back into more specialist care, even if that is residential care, to help them take that step forward again and get that continuity that is needed. If we do not put in those interventions, clearly the impairments experienced by someone will deepen, which will create pressures that will show themselves elsewhere in the NHS or the social care system. Therefore, that investment is so important for people as they are recovering from stroke.

There is clearly so much to be done. I really welcome the call for an APPG and would be happy to serve on such a group should it arise, but as we are currently reimagining healthcare, this is a real opportunity to put the patient's need at the centre of a stroke service and ensure that we sustain that for the rest of their life.

5.36 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) for securing the debate and you, Sir Edward, for allowing me to speak. Many hon. Members have spoken so eloquently about the problems of rehabilitation and post-stroke care. I must declare an interest: a close family member had a severe stroke over the last lockdown, and I can only describe the post-rehabilitation care as a hell

that I would not wish on anyone. As an educated person, I understand the pathways—we have someone there to advocate full time for this person who has had a severe and debilitating stroke—the care pathways out of hospital, however, are broken.

I cannot praise enough the wonderful doctors and the nurses—Dr Joseph Kwan is an excellent stroke specialist—and I cannot say enough good things about the hospital care we now receive through the NHS and privately; it is wonderful. However, it breaks down in rehabilitation—the post-stroke care. As any doctor, OT or speech and language therapist will say, it is how intensive the rehabilitation efforts are in those crucial months after a stroke that will determine the outcome and recovery. In those first six months, a stroke patient will need intensive speech and language OT, physical therapy and perhaps the recovery of basic skills, depending on the severity of the stroke, but it breaks down as we simply do not have the workforce capacity to manage the needs of our population. It is not the fault of anyone. It is simply that we do not have the skillset at our disposal.

Will the Minister consider meeting me and a Department for Education representative to see whether we can have a strategic recruitment drive, perhaps starting in secondary schools, to encourage young people to go into professions such as occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech and language therapy or to become a district nurse, psychologist or neuro physical therapist? We need that specialist support in so many things, but we simply do not have the qualifications or the workforce available, and yet we have young people interested in science and interested in helping in their local community. What better way, as we are restructuring and bringing new changes to the NHS, to incorporate a recruitment drive that would allow young people to enter these specialist professions? We desperately need people in those professions, to help make the difference between someone dying a terrible and painful death in their home and having the additional support they need for a recovery to make their life liveable.

I praise and pay tribute to all the silent carers of covid, who have been helping their loved ones who have suffered a stroke, and who have had to negotiate through the care pathways alone. I thank them for everything they have done. I thank all the carers and health professionals who have done everything they possibly can during covid to help those who have been suffering in silence in their homes, in out-of-hospital care.

I ask that we look at strategic, long-term recruitment for these professions to meet the needs and demands of England, and that we look at how we can develop a much more joined-up and cohesive post-stroke recovery plan, because where the process also breaks down is where someone who is in a hospital in a local authority is discharged into another local authority, where the care pathway has to pass from one council to another and from one NHS trust to another. It is very difficult to maintain a pathway that delivers and communicates that, even to your GP, so those complex pathways tend to break down at the rehabilitation level. I ask that we look at having a stroke passport that those who have recovered might take with them—a physical copy that they can take to any healthcare professional, so that they can see their records and so that there is a clear understanding of where that survivor has come from. That would ease and speed the process of recovery as new carers take on the rehabilitation of that survivor.

I thank hon. Members for being here today and for considering the complex nature of the debate. I hope that we start an all-party parliamentary group—I would have to join as well—to continue raising this important issue in the House.

5.42 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) for securing the debate and for his detailed introduction. He highlighted that there is increased awareness of the symptoms of strokes, and that acute care has certainly been on an upwards trajectory. The point that he made so eloquently and so personally was that there is still a long way to go on aftercare. He spoke of courage, patience and consistent professional care being needed, and that is something that we all want to see. A number of hon. Members added their personal perspectives to the debate. I believe we always do better when we hear those perspectives.

We also heard a professional perspective, from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who set out clearly the importance of specialist services. The question she asked about the future of those in the new structures was very important.

As we heard from various Members, strokes are very prevalent in this country—100,000 a year, or one every five minutes. We also know that two-thirds of stroke survivors leave hospital with a disability, and it is the fourth-largest cause of death in the UK. It is perplexing, as the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, that it does not get more of our attention. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) said, it is also something of a mystery why the level of research funding is not as high as in other areas, even before the challenges of the pandemic that all voluntary fundraising organisations have faced.

Members will know that the national priority in the NHS long-term plan is the national stroke programme. It is intended to deliver better prevention, treatment and care. It is an ambitious programme, but if it is to succeed, it needs adequate funding. I hope the Minister will be able to set out briefly how that funding is being allocated and what progress is being made to meet the targets and aims set out in the plan. A recent report by the Stroke Association found that thousands of stroke survivors are being let down—in various ways, as we heard in the debate, but particularly in the current provision of post-stroke support and rehabilitation.

The most recent Sentinel Stroke National Audit Programme data for April 2019 to March 2020 shows that only 41% of patients received a recorded six-month post-stroke review, and just over a third of applicable patients received recommended levels of physiotherapy or occupational therapy. Less than a fifth received the recommended levels of speech and language therapy. As hon. Members put it in different ways, those figures are clearly not good enough. It needs to be emphasised that that poor record is from before the pandemic.

There were concerns before the pandemic about the shortage of specialist stroke consultants. Figures from Kings College London showed that almost half of hospitals had a shortage of specialist stroke consultants, with 48% of hospitals in England, Wales and Northern

[Justin Madders]

Ireland having at least one consultant vacancy in the previous 12 months or more. To pick up on the comment by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey), the Stroke Association called on the Government and NHS England to make stroke medicine a more attractive proposition for junior doctors to specialise in, as well as the other specialities, and drew attention to the need for nurses and rehabilitation. Can the Minister update us on the number of consultant vacancies and say what steps are in place to introduce a plan to deliver the staffing levels that we so clearly need?

It is clear, from what everyone said, that we need to go further and faster to provide support for stroke survivors. Further investment is vital to ensure equitable access to services, avoid digital exclusion and improve health outcomes, to stop the kind of disparities that we have heard about. We must end the postcode lottery. It is so important that, no matter where you live, you get access to the same quality stroke support services, which are consistent with clinical guidelines. I hope the Minister will address the issues that Members have raised, and will set out what steps the Government intend to take to support more survivors of strokes.

5.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) not only for giving us all the opportunity to discuss this issue, but for sharing his and Ann-Louise's journey and experience. I wish her well in her future recovery, but he articulated very well what some of the challenges are, as did many other Members.

The debate has made clear how stroke touches so many lives. I can feel an APPG coming, and I would welcome it, because the Stroke Association is a fantastic charity which does great work, and I am sure that they will be listening and keen to support an APPG. I thank all those at the Princess Royal and all those—in Stockport and throughout the country—who work in stroke services in the acute sector and out in the community. As has been articulated, it is a team game to give people the proper, consistent support so that they can achieve the optimum recovery.

I am so pleased that the friend of the hon. Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) made a fully recovery, but as hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) explained clearly, using her vast expertise, why it is a different journey for different people. Some people need a much more needs-based approach, which is obviously where we hope to head. That will hopefully be music to the ears of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey). I hope to assure the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker) that we, too, are driving services in his area.

I do not have many minutes to speak, so if there are further questions I will be happy to go over them with individual Members. We have made enormous progress but, as many hon. Members said, that progress still needs work. We need to do better and we need to go faster. One of the ambitions of the long-term plan is the inclusion of a national stroke programme that looks to

improve services, including better rehab services and increased access to specialist stroke units through a flexible and skilled workforce. We heard more than once about the challenges on the workforce front.

The prevention and treatment of stroke is a key priority for the NHS. Despite the many challenges presented by covid, the stroke programme has continued to support regional delivery. In some areas, we have accelerated implementation because it is such an important area. As of 1 April, there are now 20 integrated stroke delivery networks operating to support the national stroke service model. Those networks have patient voices and public voices, which it is quite important to let everybody know, because this does need to be patient-driven, and people need to know that they are being heard. ISDNs bring together key stakeholders in stroke to deliver a joined-up, whole pathway transformation through the integrated care systems.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst knows that such an ISDN is now operational in his constituency. They will be responsible for delivering optimal stroke pathways based on best evidence, which he referred to. They will ensure that patients who experience a stroke and, so very often, quite debilitating outcomes from it, receive excellent care from pre-hospital, through to rehabilitation and then life after stroke.

There is good evidence that stroke units delivering hyper-acute stroke care 24/7 enable the NHS to achieve ever-improving outcomes. Receiving high-quality specialist care in well-equipped, well-staffed hospitals is the optimum, and 90% of stroke patients will receive care in a specialist stroke unit. More patients will have access to disability-reducing treatments of mechanical thrombectomy and thrombolysis; combined with increased access to rehabilitation, that will, hopefully, deliver long-term improvement and a more seamless pathway.

As we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Bromley and Chislehurst and for Beaconsfield, navigation of all the different systems is really part of the challenge as well. My hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk will be pleased to hear that Norfolk and Norwich is one of the new pilot areas for non-neuroscience centres that will work towards the delivery of thrombectomy.

Delivering the right treatment quickly will lead to the best outcomes. We see that with ischemic strokes: busting the clots has become increasingly effective using the right drugs and treatments. All stroke units in the UK can deliver intravenous thrombolysis. Early diagnosis by stroke specialists, followed by early thrombolysis, has been transformative in stroke care.

Thrombectomy is a procedure used to treat some stroke patients, and there is evidence that, where used appropriately, it will reduce the severity of disability. Thrombectomy is available in 22 centres, with two further non-neuroscience centres under development, of which the Norfolk and Norwich centre is one. The expansion of these services is in the long-term plan, with plans to increase the workforce who are able to perform the procedure. Owing to training requirements, that is currently restricted to neuroradiologists, which is a challenge, so we have worked with the General Medical Council to develop a credentialling programme. That will hopefully enable the acceleration of training to a wider cohort of medical professionals, such as radiologists, cardiologists and neurosurgeons.

On rehabilitation services, if the stroke patient has had a hyper-acute treatment they will need early therapy, as we have heard from so many hon. Members. That needs to be delivered by physio, speech and language therapist specialists, and should be accessible within 24 hours. We have heard of the challenges. Long-term rehabilitation is also best undertaken locally, so that people do not face the challenges of chasing around for the service—that also supports the family, who are often vital in a patient's journey—and to enable the assessment of the appropriateness of homes by occupational therapists and others. We do not want reviews every six weeks, every six months and annually. We want reviews to be patient-led, which I think is what the hon. Member for York Central was driving at.

The integrated community stroke service model has been developed by clinicians, experts and charities, whom I thank for the help that they have given us. To ensure that evidence-based care is being delivered, we have worked with them to address the variation across the country, which is a problem. The stroke rehabilitation pilots mobilised in 2020 are implementing an integrated community stroke service that will enhance care pathways, including psychological support and vocational rehabilitation. Recognising that everybody's needs are different is very important, as is delivering personal, needs-based stroke rehabilitation to every stroke survivor, in their home or place of residence.

We have funded the Stroke Association during the pandemic to provide the Stroke Association Connect service. Stroke rehabilitation pilot sites are also testing improved data collection.

The hon. Member for Stockport will be pleased to hear that we have turbocharged research, calling for more research into stroke areas, because evidence-based research is really important. Building on the rehabilitation pilot initiative, we will launch the new stroke quality improvement for rehabilitation later in 2021. Working closely with integrated stroke delivery networks, that will help address variation. Combined with funding for quality improvement projects and expansion of community

data, we will then expand. In addition, the national stroke service model, due for publication in late spring, will support that service. The Government have initiated the biggest recruitment drive for allied health professionals in decades, including speech and language therapists and occupational therapists.

I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst a couple of minutes to respond, but in conclusion, I hope I have demonstrated that this is a serious issue. I know the stroke community will have heard our discussion. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the subject more fully, when there is time for me to go over some of the developments and ambitions we have to ensure that we impact the lives of people with strokes. We can give them significant benefits, we can benefit the NHS and, as my hon. Friend said, we can bring people back the best way that we can.

5.56 pm

Sir Robert Neill: I am grateful to all hon. Members who have participated in the debate. I know that time is short. I am grateful to the Minister for the tone of her response. We will want to press her, in the most constructive way, on some of the detail of the funding, how we actually get the nuts and bolts done and how we deliver services on the ground. The aspiration is clearly there—we all share it—but we want to see that delivered. We are very happy to work with her on that; perhaps we can speak offline on how we might be able to achieve that.

I am grateful for all the expertise and the experience that hon. Members have laid out. I conclude by thanking everyone who takes an interest in stroke care, above all the carers. We ought to remember the informal carers—the families—who do so much, as well as the professionals. They need their recognition at the end of this debate too.

5.57 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 21 April 2021

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Official Development Assistance Budget 2021-22

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): The FCDO has responsibility for delivering £8,115 million of official development assistance (ODA) spend this year, approximately 80% of total UK ODA. I have recently concluded the FCDO's internal business planning process to allocate this budget for 2021-22 in accordance with UK strategic priorities against a challenging financial climate as a result of covid-19. This statement updates the House on the conclusions of that process.

Throughout the business planning process, we strived to ensure that every penny of the FCDO's ODA spend brings maximum strategic coherence, impact and value for taxpayers' money.

The resulting portfolio marks a strategic shift, putting our aid budget to work alongside our diplomatic network, our science and technology expertise and our economic partnerships in tackling global challenges. We will focus on core HMG priorities for poverty reduction, including getting more girls into school, providing urgent humanitarian support to those who need it most, and tackling global threats like climate change, covid-19 recovery and other international health priorities. Based on OECD data for 2020, the UK will be the third largest donor within the G7 as a percentage of GNI.

The integrated review has helped guide the process, by setting out how an independent and sovereign global Britain will act as a force for good and use its influence to shape the future international order. To deliver that vision I have allocated resources to the seven priorities I set out to Parliament on 26 November:

Climate and biodiversity. FCDO will maintain a strong climate and biodiversity portfolio of £534 million as we host COP26. In total, the FCDO will deliver more than £941 million of activities this year, across all themes, that count towards the UK's flagship £11.6 billion international climate finance target.

Global health security. FCDO will spend £1,305 million on global health. We will focus on the UK's position at the forefront of the international response to covid-19, through our commitments to COVAX, GAVI and WHO, and through bilateral spend where the need is greatest in Africa.

Girls' education. FCDO will spend £400 million on girls' education. We will invest directly in over 25 countries, helping to achieve the global target to get 40 million girls into education and demonstrating our commitment at this year's Global Partnership for Education summit.

Humanitarian preparedness and response. FCDO will spend £906 million to maintain the UK's role as a force for good at times of crisis, focusing our work on those countries most affected by risk of famine, including Yemen, Syria, Somalia, and South Sudan. A £30 million crisis reserve will enable us to respond rapidly to new crises.

Science and Technology. FCDO will make £251 million of R&D investments across all seven themes of this strategy, with £38 million targeted directly at science and technology including new innovations to tackle development challenges, including innovations in satellite imagery and AI to support humanitarian responses.

Open societies and conflict resolution. FCDO will spend £419 million to harness the UK's unique strengths in conflict management and resolution, and to project our support for democratic values and institutions, human rights, and freedom of religious belief. We will further drive impact and support democratic values and institutions through our diplomacy, including our new sanctions policy, which will shortly be extended to cover corruption. We have also protected civil society programmes, particularly Comic Relief, Commonwealth Veterans, Jo Cox memorial grants within UK Aid Direct, UK Aid Match and VSO.

Economic development and trade. FCDO will spend £491 million to support new trade relationships with developing country partners, complementing our wider multilateral and capital investments to build the trade and investment partners of the future. We will use CDC and multilateral partners to drive mutually beneficial growth with strategic partners in circumstances where private sector investment is not practicable.

A further £3,159 million will meet the Government's cross-cutting contributions to multilateral partners and global funds, including our pledge to remain the largest donor to IDA19, the African Development Fund, and other multilateral development banks; support arm's length bodies such as the British Council; and cover FCDO operating costs. This is complemented by the ODA spent by other Government Departments, which I set out in a written ministerial statement on 26 January 2021.

Within this framework, I have also ensured that the UK is able to exert maximum influence as a force for good in Africa and strategically tilt towards the Indo-Pacific. FCDO will spend around half its bilateral ODA budget in Africa, where human suffering remains most acute, including a major shift to west Africa to reflect the UK's unique role and clear national strategic interest. One third of FCDO bilateral ODA will be spent in the Indo-Pacific and south Asia, in support of our deeper engagement in that region, promoting open societies, reinforcing trade links and promoting climate change collaboration.

In China, I have reduced FCDO's ODA for programme delivery by 95% to £0.9 million—with additional ODA in this year only to meet the contractual exit costs of former programmes. The remaining £900,000 will fund programmes on open societies and human rights.

The UK remains a world leader in international development, not only through the impact of these financial allocations but also through the creation of the FCDO, integrating diplomacy and development to deliver greater impact. We will return to our commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on ODA when the fiscal situation allows.

Thematic Allocation	
Thematic Area	FCDO ODA Allocation 2021-22, £m
Climate change and biodiversity	534
Covid-19 and global health	1,305
Girls' education	400
Humanitarian preparedness and response	906
Open societies and conflict	419
Science, research and technology	38 (plus thematic R&D)

Thematic Allocation	
Thematic Area	FCDO ODA Allocation 2021-22, £m
Trade and economic development	491
Financial transactions	863
Programmes with cross cutting themes	1,940
AKBs, International subscriptions and other fixed costs	1,219
Total	8,115

[HCWS935]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Consumer Connected Product Cyber

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): This Government have ambitious plans to ensure that the increasingly diverse range of consumer products that can connect to the internet are more secure by having cyber-security designed into them by default.

Since 2018, the UK has been recognised by industry and the security research community as defining a world leading approach of strong cyber-security measures for connected products. My Department published a code of practice for Consumer Internet of Things (IoT) Security on 14 October 2018. Developed in collaboration with industry and cyber-security experts, this set out 13 outcome-led guidelines that manufacturers would need to implement in order to improve the cyber-security of their consumer IoT products. The UK Government have also contributed significantly to the first globally-applicable industry standard on consumer IoT Security—ETSI EN 303 645.

Our work has since been endorsed and supported by the ‘Five Eyes’—a collective statement of intent was published in 2019—as well as the Australian Government—their 2020 code of practice consists of the same 13 principles as those we published in 2018—the Governments of Singapore and Finland—whose national IoT labelling schemes reflects our work—and the Government of India—who published a draft code of practice advocating the same 13 guidelines of our 2018 code of practice.

The Government initially encouraged industry to resolve the issue of insecure consumer-connected products voluntarily. However, despite the publication of the code of practice and the development of industry standards, in many cases, poor security practices remain commonplace.

In May 2019, DCMS launched a consultation on regulatory proposals advocating a minimum baseline cyber-security requirement. There was widespread support for the UK Government seeking to regulate the security of consumer connected products. From July to September 2020, the Government ran a call for views on detailed proposals to regulate the cyber-security of these products, to ensure they are more secure for people to use.

I am pleased to inform the House that today we are publishing a Government response to this call for views. We summarise the feedback received in response to the call for views as well as set out the Government’s response to that feedback, and provide an overview of our updated policy intentions for regulation in this space.

In line with the intentions detailed in the document published today, we will introduce legislation as parliamentary time allows to protect consumers from insecure connected products. This regulation will apply to all consumer connected products such as smart speakers, smart televisions, connected doorbells, connected toys and smartphones, with some specific exemptions due to the specific circumstances of how certain devices are constructed, secured, and regulated, or the impact that regulating these products would have. The security requirements that will be mandated will align with the UK code of practice, and international standards, so are familiar to all manufacturers and other relevant parties across industry. The legislation will also provide powers to investigate allegations of non-compliance and to take steps to ensure compliance.

As a reserved matter, these proposed amendments will apply across the UK. The security of consumer smart products is a priority across the whole of the UK, and my officials will continue to work closely with the devolved Administrations on this policy.

[HCWS934]

WORK AND PENSIONS

State Pension Underpayments

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): I wish to update the House on the state pension correction activity that is addressing historical errors, that were unaddressed by successive Governments, following on from my statement on 4 March.

We are fully committed to ensuring that any historical errors are addressed as quickly as possible to ensure that individuals receive the state pension they are rightfully due in law. While I am pleased to report that good progress has been made in the examination of cases, this is a complex and resource intensive process requiring the clerical examination of many thousands of state pension records.

The Department already has a dedicated team of over 150 people working on the correction activity. Throughout 2021-22 we intend to increase significantly the capacity of the team with the recruitment of an additional 360 staff. We expect this additional resource will speed up the correction activity, with the aim to complete the exercise by the end of 2023.

However, it is important to note that estimates on the numbers affected, and costs, are currently based on highly complex scans of the computer system, analysis of DWP administrative data and very small samples of cases randomly selected and reviewed. They are highly uncertain and will be further refined by our analysts as the correction activity progresses and we are able to base estimates on management information gathered from cases actually reviewed and corrected.

Individuals who are in the affected groups do not need to contact the Department. We are in the process of issuing letters to all those found to be underpaid in accordance with the law, explaining how much they will be receiving in arrears and the reasons for the change to their state pension rate.

The Department will publish further information on the progress of the state pension correction activity around the time of the next fiscal event.

[HCWS933]

Petition

Wednesday 21 April 2021

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Privatisation of York Hospital's Emergency Department

The petition of residents of the constituency of York Central,

The petitioners of York declare that they oppose all proposals to move access to some services at York Hospital's Emergency Department (initial assessment, streaming and minor injury care) away from the NHS to a private company; further that the Royal College of Emergency Medicine clearly states that the Emergency Department should control the front door of the Emergency Department, not some third-party organisation; further that clinical governance have not considered how this reorganisation will disrupt patient pathways and clinical networks; further that the governance have not considered how this will impact the clinical supervision of staff and governance of patient care; further that they have not fully engaged with the clinical specialists working in this filed; further that this extends the privatisation of the NHS in a critical care facility and that such a move is not in the interests of patient care or clinical governance within the Emergency Department; further that we are managing a very difficult pandemic where there should be no distraction from the delivery of clinical services; and notes that the Health Secretary expects to bring forward a White Paper outlining a reorganisation of the NHS, which could have implications for access to Emergency Departments, the treatment of minor injuries and trauma and general practice.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons calls on the Government to recognise that the proposal to outsource work done by the Emergency Department of York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is ill-conceived, poorly timed and against the interests of patients; to prevent this outsourcing to the private sector; and to revise these plans for York Teaching Hospital only when the Government has published its White Paper and subsequent Bill on NHS reorganisation.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rachael Maskell, *Official Report*, 24 March 2021; Vol. 691, c. 1026.]

[P002654]

Observations from The Minister for Health (Edward Argar):

The ongoing discussions about the reorganisation of the Emergency Department and Urgent Treatment Centre at York Hospital follow the advice from the Humber, Coast and Vale Integrated Care System (ICS) to the Trust that the current UTC for York residents is non-compliant with the national UTC specification.

The two current providers of the UTC, the Trust itself and Vocare have agreed to continue to work together to ensure that current UTC standards, as set out in *Urgent Treatment Centres: Principles and Standards*, (NHS England, July 2017, updated February 2021) and *Transformation of urgent and emergency Care: models of care and measurement*, (NHS England/Improvement, December 2020) can be met as quickly as possible to ensure that York has a fully compliant UTC that best meets patients' needs.

The Trust Emergency Department will continue to be the chief provider of emergency and urgent care, with Vocare—a pre-existing provider of urgent care services in York for over six years—providing UTC services jointly with the Trust to nationally expected clinical standards. The Trust is contracted to provide emergency services and this is not changing.

The Trust's emergency department staff have been involved in the discussions about this for some time.

This has included frontline clinical involvement in a series of clinical workshops and a clinical reference group, and all providers have supported and agreed ways of working. A shadow provider alliance board, incorporating all key local organisations, is also being established in April to oversee urgent care integration arrangements. Frontline clinicians will continue to be involved in this work.

Staff employed by the Trust will continue to work jointly with Vocare staff to deliver the service, and establish joint governance arrangements. The triage part of the service will continue to be delivered by trust-employed emergency department staff. No staff will be TUPE transferred from the trust to Vocare.

As this is not a service change, but rather the agreement of further joint governance arrangements between two existing partners, the NHS trust does not believe that hospital managers/staff will be distracted from their important role of delivering clinical services during the pandemic.

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PETITION

Wednesday 21 April 2021

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**not later than
Wednesday 28 April 2021**

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