

**Wednesday  
11 May 2022**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 11 May 2022**

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## House of Commons

*Wednesday 11 May 2022*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

### Speaker's Statement

**Mr Speaker:** As colleagues will know, the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee is elected each Session. Nominations are now open and will close at 5 pm on Monday 16 May. Nomination forms are available from the Vote Office, the Table Office and the Public Bill Office. Only Members from a party not represented in government may be candidates. Candidates need the support of no fewer than 10 Members from the Government side of the House, and no fewer than 10 Members from a party not represented in Government, or from no party. If there is more than one candidate, the ballot will take place on Wednesday 18 May from 11 am to 2.30 pm in the Aye Lobby.

As Neil Parish has ceased to be a Member of this House, I must declare the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee vacant and announce arrangements for the election of a new Chair. Nominations are now open and will close at 12 noon on Tuesday 24 May. Nomination forms are available from the Vote Office, the Table Office and the Public Bill Office. Following the House's decision of 16 January 2020, only Members of the Conservative party may be candidates. If there is more than one candidate, the ballot will take place on Wednesday 25 May from 11 am to 2.30 pm in the Aye Lobby. Briefing notes with more information about each election will be made available in the Vote Office.

## Ukraine: UK Military Support

11.35 am

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on UK military support to Ukraine.

**The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty):** The United Kingdom strongly condemns the appalling, unprovoked attack President Putin has launched on the people of Ukraine. We continue to stand with Ukraine and continue to support its right to be a sovereign, independent and democratic nation.

The United Kingdom and our allies and partners are responding decisively to provide military and humanitarian assistance. This includes weapons that help Ukraine's heroic efforts to defend itself. We have sent more than 6,900 new anti-tank missiles, known as NLAWs—next-generation light anti-tank weapons—a further consignment of Javelin anti-tank missiles, eight air defence systems, including Starstreak anti-air missiles, 1,360 anti-structure munitions and 4.5 tonnes of plastic explosives.

As Ukraine steadies itself for the next attack, the UK is stepping up efforts to help its defence. As we announced on 26 April, we will be sending 300 more missiles, anti-tank systems, innovative loitering munitions, armoured fighting vehicles and anti-ship systems to stop shelling from Russian ships.

The United Kingdom has confirmed £1.3 billion of new funding for military operations and aid to Ukraine. This includes the £300 million the Prime Minister announced on 3 May for electronic warfare equipment, a counter-battery radar system, GPS jamming equipment and thousands of night-vision devices.

The Ministry of Defence retains the humanitarian assistance taskforce at readiness; its headquarters are at 48-hours readiness, and the remainder of the force can move with five days' notice, should its assistance be requested. The UK has pledged £220 million of humanitarian aid for Ukraine, which includes granting in kind to the Ukraine armed forces more than 64,000 items of medical equipment from the MOD's own supplies. We are ensuring that the UK and our security interests are secured and supporting our many allies and partners, especially Ukraine.

**John Healey:** The Secretary of State promised to keep the House updated on Ukraine; I am grateful for your help, Mr Speaker, in ensuring that he has done so today with this urgent question. It is the 77th day of Putin's invasion of Ukraine. The United Kingdom is united in condemnation of Russia and in solidarity with Ukraine. From the outset, the Government have had Labour's full support for military assistance to Ukraine, and we give it again today. There was no mass mobilisation from President Putin on Monday, but we must now expect this conflict to be long and slow. The UK now needs to shift from crisis management of the conflict to delivering the medium-term military support that Ukraine will need for Putin's next offensive. This means new NATO weapons, instead of Soviet-era equipment. Can I ask the Minister whether the UK has begun supplying NATO stocks to Ukrainian fighters? Will that include artillery, training to form new brigades, and air defence systems? How many Ukrainians have so far been trained by the UK on new NATO-standard weapons?

[John Healey]

More than two weeks ago, the Defence Secretary promised to place in the Library an update of the total number of weapons supplied to Ukraine by the UK and western allies. It is not yet there; when will that be done?

Will the Minister spell out the UK's and NATO's objectives in supplying this military assistance to Ukraine? For instance, are the Government considering, with allies, maritime support to help trading in and out of the port of Odesa? Who is leading the Government's new inquiry into UK components that end up in Russian weaponry? Is it still the case, 11 weeks into the conflict, that contracts have not been signed for new UK supplies of next-generation light anti-tank weapons and Starstreak missiles, which have proved vital in Ukraine?

Finally, this week, the head of the British Army said that the Army is too small, despite Conservatives voting down Labour's motion in this House a year ago to halt further cuts. Will the Minister accept that there was a defence-shaped hole in the Queen's Speech, and that the Government must now rewrite the integrated review, review defence spending, reform military procurement and rethink Army cuts?

**Leo Docherty:** I am grateful to be here answering the shadow Secretary of State's questions. He will know that the Secretary of State regrets not being here; he is in the United States, continuing discussions with our closest NATO ally about our collective defence. He looks forward to further opportunities to update the House in person.

I put on record that we continue to appreciate Labour's support on all issues attendant to Ukraine. The right hon. Gentleman rightly reflects on the fact that the invasion of Ukraine is now moving to a long and slow medium-term phase—to a war of attrition in the east, which still incurs a great cost of human life to Ukrainians and the Russian armed forces. We will continue discussions with our Ukrainian allies on the weapons systems and support provided, but fundamentally and overwhelmingly, it is hugely important to meet the requests that come from the Ukrainians themselves. The provision needs to be made in accordance with what they are asking for.

We will see, over the coming years, the wholesale institutional reinvigoration of the Ukrainian armed forces, and I think the United Kingdom will have a proud role at the centre of that institutional rejuvenation. We have been proud to build on our legacy of training involvement; it started in 2014 with the hugely successful Operation Orbital, which trained some 25,000 Ukrainian armed forces. There is a good legacy of joint working that we will continue to take forward.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about providing an update to the Library. Following this urgent question, I will ensure that that is provided with all due haste. He asked about the objectives on security and trade. I think he was hinting at the requirement that the Ukrainians be able to export their hugely significant grain harvest out of Odesa and other ports. Of course, those trade questions are a matter for the Secretary of State for International Trade, but the economic component of our support and our defensive relationship with Ukraine is not lost. There will be a whole package of support that allows Ukraine to flourish as a sovereign territory. This is about not just the reinvestment in the Ukrainian

armed forces but the rejuvenation of the economy and the rebuilding of the physical infrastructure of much of the country, which has been heinously destroyed since the commencement of the war on 24 February.

The right hon. Gentleman then made some comments about the size of the British armed forces, and I am happy to answer them directly. Thanks to the £24-billion uplift in defence spending, we are in good shape and in good size. We have what we need to deliver the effect that we need; we are a threat-led organisation. We are agile and mobile and we are more lethal than ever before.

The integrated review was proved right by the invasion of Ukraine, in the sense that we need a military that can project power around the globe and that can use loitering munitions, drones and other forms of munitions delivery, which are not so much about the close-quarter fight. We have more money than ever before and we are in good shape, but of course we keep all those things under review. I reiterate my expectation that the Secretary of State will be pleased to have an opportunity in the near future to keep the House informed of our discussions with our Ukrainian allies and the US.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Putin's war has displayed the woeful inadequacy of the Russian military. However, one thing it has that we do not is hypersonic missiles, which it has used against Mykolaiv and now Odesa. Does the Minister regard that as a gap in our defence matériel, and if he does, what measures is he taking to stop that gap, perhaps with reference to the AUKUS—Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom—treaty and the possibility of a joint programme with our two great allies?

**Leo Docherty:** My right hon. and gallant Friend makes a very good point: we have seen the woeful inadequacy of the Russian military. I do not know whether he was able to listen to the Defence Secretary's speech at the National Army Museum earlier this week, but it laid out the operational failings at all levels across the Russian army that have so painfully resulted in such significant casualties. He makes an interesting point about hypersonic missiles. I will not speculate at the Dispatch Box about future capabilities. However, a lot of this sort of work is done in Farnborough in my constituency by the defence industry there, and my right hon. Friend can rest assured that at the very heart of our defence proposition in the integrated review is energetic and significant investment in cutting-edge defensive technologies.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP): The Minister mentioned 300 additional missiles, but what can he tell us about the capability we are extending to the Ukrainians with anti-ship missiles? He deflected the grain exports issues to his colleague the Secretary of State for International Trade. Of course, we are not talking about treaties or grain prices; we are talking about the safety of ships going in and out of Ukraine. Can he expand on that a little bit more seriously?

On 3 May, the UK Government pledged an additional £300 million in military aid to Ukraine, and the Secretary of State has advised the House that the Government has given £200 million to date. Can the Minister confirm

that apparent £500 million figure? It has also emerged that the Secretary of State for Defence has warned the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the UK risks falling short, as soon as 2025, of its NATO commitment to spending 2% of GDP on defence, due to the compound effect of inflation and supplying armaments to Ukraine. Could the Minister respond on that, and on the Ministry's ambition to control that by redoubling its efforts to minimise waste?

What discussions has the Minister had with our NATO and other international allies about the worry that Putin and his regime will resort to the use of chemical weapons and worse on civilian targets in Ukraine?

**Leo Docherty:** The hon. Member asks a series of interesting questions. I have referred to the anti-ship systems; I take the point made on that. It is in a public source that the Brimstone capability has been deployed, and we regard that as a highly potent system. I think that will provide some security. He rightly makes the point that that links to the ability of the Ukrainians to export their not inconsiderable grain supplies. I will engage with the Secretary of State for International Trade, but this matter is firmly within the focus of the matrix of military support that we provide to the Ukrainians.

**Dave Doogan:** It is a security problem.

**Leo Docherty:** Yes, I know. This is on the economic element of the issue, and it is, of course, meeting the Ukrainians' own request. We are not telling the Ukrainians what to do—it is their operation—but the economic side, including grain provision and the security attendant on that, is something on which we are seeking to support them.

The hon. Member mentioned our commitment to the NATO standard of spending 2% on defence, and of course that is being challenged by inflation. We keep that constantly under review. He invites me to comment, or to lobby the Treasury from the Dispatch Box, and I will resist that temptation. However, I think he can be reassured that we have shown an absolute commitment to putting our money where our mouth is when it comes to defence investment, supporting our allies and maintaining our commitment to NATO. We invested that £1.3 billion because of that, and we will keep it under review.

The hon. Member raised the question of whether President Putin might commit atrocities of a chemical nature. I will not speculate on what course of action the Russian President may choose, but the international community's resolve since the illegal invasion on 24 February shows that he will be held to account, and that there will be no tolerance of any chemical atrocity. We hope that in due course, after this phase of operations and with our support, the Ukrainians will allow the collection of evidence of all Russian atrocities, so that Putin and his cronies can be held to account in the International Criminal Court.

**Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con):** As the Ukrainians retake their territory, there is an urgent need for kit to repair roads and bridges, so that they can get equipment and troops to the frontline. Can we supply any temporary bridges and other hardware to help in this important work?

**Leo Docherty:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The rebuilding challenge to be completed by our Ukrainian friends, supported by allies, will be huge. The rebuilding of infrastructure will cost billions of dollars. I think that we will be supporting that effort from the Government side, and I am sure that there will be many private sector opportunities. Bridges will be involved in that infrastructure effort.

**Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab):** Russia has significant cyber-attack and cyber-defence capabilities. Can we provide assistance to the Ukrainians so that they can adequately defend themselves against such attacks?

**Leo Docherty:** That is an extremely pertinent question. The answer is yes. Of course, there are other centres of excellence around the world; the Estonians, for example, know a great deal about countering the Russian cyber-threat. We must understand and be aware that the collective western response is not just about positioning large, static forces of men and women in military units; it is also about ensuring that Ukraine and her allies are afforded a robust cyber-defence.

**Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con):** I thank the Minister for his statement and for the work that he is doing. We are fortunate to have excellent Ministers leading the Defence Department. NATO continues to be the bedrock of our collective security, and I welcome the steps to deploy more troops to eastern Europe. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must step up co-operation with our friends in NATO, as well as with other European allies? I note that today the Prime Minister is in Finland and Sweden. Does he agree that, in the face of Russian aggression, it is vital that we support our European allies?

**Leo Docherty:** I agree entirely with that analysis. That is why the Defence Secretary is today in the US—our hugely significant NATO ally. We have continued our work with the joint expeditionary force of amphibian, beer drinking nations of northern Europe, and we are delighted about the Prime Minister's trip.

On the position of Finland and Sweden, they will choose their own path—NATO is an alliance that waits for people to ask to become members; it does not go around proselytising—but the way in which we have worked closely with such nations in the JEF, and their possible interest in NATO, shows the importance and resolve of the NATO alliance. We are much stronger together, because we have many friends. That is why Russia is much weaker: because it has no allies.

**Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab):** Decisions about military support to Ukraine are inevitably taken in the context of the state and the size of our armed forces. I am sure that the Minister is a regular reader of *Soldier* magazine; has he seen the Chief of the General Staff's comments expressing concern about the size of the Army? He is right, isn't he?

**Leo Docherty:** We are a threat-led organisation. As a result of the £24 billion uplift in defence spending, we are in good shape, in good size and more lethal, more mobile and more agile than ever before. Of course, we keep the situation under review but, in a nutshell, I think that the invasion of Ukraine has proved the integrated review right.

**Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con): My hon. and gallant Friend the Minister will know that weapons and military equipment can only be used if troops are trained effectively to use them, so can he outline what avenues he is exploring to continue to provide the military training necessary for Ukrainian troops to counter Russian attacks, as they have been doing so admirably?

**Leo Docherty:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Those discussions are ongoing. We will be guided by what the Ukrainians themselves want, but I think we are all encouraged by the legacy of close co-operation born out of Operation Orbital, running since 2014 and training some 25,000 Ukrainian troops. So I foresee a very bright future for very close operational and training working between ourselves and the magnificent and courageous Ukrainian armed forces.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): May I associate myself and my party with the strong support for Ukraine that has been expressed by the Minister and the shadow Secretary of State? Last month, I raised with the Secretary of State the issue of the deadly legacy being left by retreating Russian forces in parts of Ukraine, namely, lethal landmines. Can I press the Minister? What equipment has been sent to Ukraine at this stage and will advice be offered along with that equipment?

**Leo Docherty:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. Those discussions are ongoing and we will be guided by requests from our Ukrainian friends, but we have a significant body of unique expertise in this country primarily because of our two-decade involvement in operational soldiering in the middle east. Some third sector organisations in this country, such as the HALO Trust and others, have, often born of military experience, conducted hugely impressive de-mining operations in the far east and the middle east. I think that is a significant body of experience that we might be able to offer up to our Ukrainian friends. The mines used by Russian forces demonstrate, if anyone was in any doubt, the casual disregard for civilian life that the Russians are so regrettably and so callously displaying in Ukraine.

**Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): I strongly welcome the Minister's update on the UK's continued support for Ukraine with the supply of more weapons today. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the type of equipment we provide will evolve as circumstances demand, as the situation is developing, unfortunately, into a war of attrition? Can he further confirm that our commitment will continue for as long as it takes for Putin to fail, as he must?

**Leo Docherty:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I can confirm that the provision of equipment will evolve. I regard all the provision we have made as defensive, because this is absolutely a defensive war: it is a sovereign state defending its sovereign territory very courageously. I should also point out that alongside the kit it is about the provision of training and doctrine. Ukrainians are experts in how to fight, but it is the training, the doctrine and the ability to join up operations in all domains—in which the Ukrainians have displayed a remarkable facility—that are important. I foresee a

long and significant defence relationship in terms of equipment, but also a very important defence relationship in terms of shared training, doctrine and mobilisation with our Ukrainian friends.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister says there is sufficiency within the armed forces. However, we are in peacekeeping operations and security operations. We are not in combat in Ukraine. Therefore, if there is an escalation of risk, whether in Ukraine or as a result of food shortage elsewhere around the globe, that is seriously going to challenge our capability, is it not?

**Leo Docherty:** Our armed forces are more mobile, deployable and agile than ever before. That is what will meet the threats that we face, and that is what the integrated review got right. Our support to Ukraine has been very small in terms of mass, but—on the hon. Lady's question about our armed forces' readiness, or capacity, to react to future threats globally—she should be reassured that, thanks to the £24 billion uplift in defence spending, we are in good shape. We do not want large bodies of men and women sitting in barracks; we want them deployable, ready, lethal and agile.

**James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): I want to ask the Minister about policy resilience. We heard from him that the level of support to Ukraine will continue, but for how long will it continue, particularly if the conflict goes from months into years and becomes an attritional campaign? Also, is that view and stance shared by all our other allies?

**Leo Docherty:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question; he pays close attention to these matters. We have all been clear that our support to Ukraine will, I expect, last many years. We have had a very close defence relationship since 2014. We are moving to a phase of the campaign that is attritional and will be continued at tragic and significant cost to the Russian state. We cannot speculate about how long that might last, but we must be prepared for it to last for a very long time.

We should be reassured by the fact that we and our allies across western Europe have the resolve to see this through, because apart from kit and equipment, resolve is the key ingredient to a successful military campaign. We have all observed how the Russian armed forces are completely absent in terms of the moral element. I would be reassured by the fact that, throughout NATO and our military and diplomatic alliances in western Europe, that resolve is shared, and we are much stronger because we are part of an amazing alliance. Our position is different from that of Russia because it has very few friends.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The humanitarian support that the Minister mentioned includes how we welcome Ukrainian people who want sanctuary. A constituent of mine is sponsoring a family of five. The first visa was approved on 13 April and the fifth visa took until 9 May. Those delays are inexcusable and impossible to understand for those applying or for the public in this country. Will he again raise with his

colleagues across Government the importance of getting this right and offering that welcome in a timely and humanitarian way?

**Leo Docherty:** I thank the hon. Gentleman's constituents for showing that compassion. The British public's response has been absolutely magnificent in this regard. I will raise that issue with the relevant Home Office Minister.

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Minister talks about the agility of the British Army, but do we not also need some agility in the thinking of Defence Ministers? It is clear that the integrated review was written with a very different world in mind. It almost entirely overlooked the threat of war in Europe, and we have seen in our history the danger of being complacent. I worry that the hubris of Ministers in defending that integrated review will prevent them from showing the agility to change, now that the threat has changed. Will he think again about the decision to cut 10,000 more of our troops, which the CGS is concerned about, and the decision on Challenger tanks, and make sure that we can deal with whatever threat faces us?

**Leo Docherty:** I contest the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of the integrated review. He will know from reading it that Russia as a threat is, first and foremost, contained in the analysis of the integrated review, so it was alive to the threat on the European mainland. We retain agility of thought across the ministerial team. We are a threat-led organisation. We will continue to keep our defence posture under review, but thanks to the £24 billion uplift, we are in good shape.

**Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): I commend the Minister for the amount of humanitarian and military aid going to Ukraine, but what assessment has he made of the Ukrainians' capacity to distribute that humanitarian aid effectively, and of the Ukrainian army's ability to get that equipment into the theatre effectively, and its skills and capacity to use it effectively?

**Leo Docherty:** That is an interesting pair of questions. When it comes to the robustness and the organisational ability of the Ukrainian armed forces and humanitarian forces, we have been reassured and amazed by their

resilience and by the extent to which they have maintained their integrity in their operational capability, so we should be confident that all support that we provide, whether it be defensive lethal aid or humanitarian aid, is reaching its required destination.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): The UN has said that the Ukrainian death toll is likely to be much higher than the 3,381 so far confirmed. What support is the UK offering to help Ukraine to retrieve and count its dead and ensure that families are informed where possible?

**Leo Docherty:** We will, of course, afford all help that we can following requests from Ukraine. We should put it on record that we are expectant that the Ukrainians, with our support if required, will do a very thorough job of gathering all relevant evidence of Russian atrocities—especially against innocent civilians, women and children—in order that Putin and his cronies are held to account very firmly and in good order in front of the International Criminal Court.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): From Saturday until yesterday morning, I had the opportunity to be in Poland and see some of the things that the Polish nation is doing for Ukrainian refugees. It is good that, whenever we speak to Foreign Ministers there, they tell us that the people of the United Kingdom and their Government have been exceptionally helpful. I want to put it on the record that that came straight from the ministerial Department.

In the light of the suggestion from US intelligence that Putin is bedding in for the long haul, will the Minister make it clear that our military aid, including anti-tank missiles and supplies from Belfast and my constituency of Strangford, will also be available for the long haul, along with the humanitarian aid that is very important for the victims of Putin's oppression, aggression and violence?

**Leo Docherty:** I can absolutely give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance. What I think is unique about the nations supporting Ukraine is their collective resolve and our absolutely firm determination to see this through for the long term, however many years that may be.

## Jim Fitton: Detention in Iraq

**Mr Speaker:** I point out to the House that the scope of this urgent question is narrow, focusing on one particular case. I am therefore not expecting hon. Members to raise broader unrelated issues. I expect proceedings on this question to last for roughly 20 minutes. I hope that hon. Members will bear that in mind when considering whether to seek to catch my eye.

12.8 pm

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) (Urgent Question):** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if she will make a statement on Jim Fitton.

**The Minister for Europe and North America (James Cleverly):** I thank the hon. Lady for raising this important case. I recognise that this is a very distressing time for Mr Fitton and his family. I would also like to reassure hon. Members that consular officials continue to maintain contact with Mr Fitton and his family—indeed, they met his family this morning—and we liaise with his lawyers to provide consular assistance. Since his arrest in March, consular officials have visited Mr Fitton on four occasions.

We understand the urgency and the concerns that Mr Fitton and his family have. We cannot, of course, interfere or seek to interfere with the judicial process of another country, just as we would not expect interference in our own judicial process. That said, the British ambassador in Baghdad has raised and will continue to raise Mr Fitton's case with the Iraqi Government. That includes raising with the authorities the UK's strong opposition to the death penalty, in the context of both its potential application to Mr Fitton and our in-principle opposition to it in all instances.

**Wera Hobhouse:** Thank you for granting the urgent question, Mr Speaker.

I am deeply concerned by the nature of the Foreign Office's engagement with my constituent's case. Jim is a 66-year-old geologist. He is sitting in a cell in Iraq, he has missed his daughter's wedding and he potentially faces the death penalty. His family are worried sick. Nearly a quarter of a million people have signed a petition urging the Government to help Jim, whose lawyer believes that representations from the British Government could make a huge difference to his case, but I am afraid the Government give the impression that they are not particularly interested or worried. Ministerial engagement has been slow: it took 10 days for the Minister's private office to inform me that a meeting with Jim's family was not on the cards.

Jim is days now away from a trial. We are told that the Government will not be making crucial representations to the Iraqi Government. I understand that the German Government are making representations on behalf of one of their nationals who has been detained with Jim; why will the Foreign Office not do the same?

I hope that the Minister will be able to answer these key questions. Jim's trial is fast approaching. Will the Minister meet me and Jim's family before the trial, and before it is too late? Will he commit himself to making representations to his Iraqi counterpart, as the German authorities are doing? This matter has implications far

beyond Jim's case; it fits into a concerning pattern of the UK Government's failing to do enough for its citizens abroad. Can the Minister clarify his view of the role of the Foreign Office in supporting British citizens who run foul of legal injustice and draconian laws abroad, as has happened in Jim's case? Will he commit himself to a root-and-branch review of the way in which the Foreign Office responds to situations such as this?

British citizens deserve the help of the British Government. Jim Fitton is potentially facing the death penalty. I urge Ministers to do everything they can to stop this nightmare before it turns into a tragedy.

**James Cleverly:** I completely reject the hon. Lady's assertions about the role of the British Government in this case, and in other consular cases. Let me remind the House of the facts, with your indulgence, Mr Speaker: I do think it is worth going into this in detail.

On 23 March, shortly after Mr Fitton's arrest, consular officials visited him in detention. On 4 April, consular officials visited him again. On 10 April, the British ambassador to Iraq raised his case with the Iraqi authorities. On 25 April, consular officials visited Mr Fitton in detention again. On 1 May, the British embassy sent a note verbale to the Iraqi Government on Mr Fitton's case. On the same date, and on 8 May, the British ambassador again raised the issue of Mr Fitton's case with the Iraqi Government. Also on 8 May, consular officials visited Mr Fitton in detention. On 10 May, the British ambassador again raised Mr Fitton's case with the Iraqi officials. On 11 May—just today, as I said—the family met our expert consular officials.

We do these things not because cases are raised in the House, but because they are the right things to do. I am proud of the work done both by our officials in Iraq and by the consular team in the UK to support individuals who have been arrested and their families. We will of course continue to raise this case with the Iraqi officials, we will of course continue to liaise with Mr Fitton and his family, and we will continue to support British nationals in incarceration around the globe.

**James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con):** Mr Fitton is not my constituent, but a large number of his family and friends live in the village of Box, just outside Bath.

I have two caveats. First, I entirely accept the Minister's injunction that this is not a matter for the British Government and must come under the Iraqi judicial system; that is perfectly correct. Secondly, ancient relics are extremely important to the Iraqi Government, particularly post Saddam Hussein. I also, incidentally, reject much of what the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) had to say about the consular service in general. In my experience it is outstandingly good, and it is quite wrong to attack it in general because of this particular case.

That said, we have here an elderly—he is a little younger than me, but none the less elderly—scientist who inadvertently picked up a couple of shards in Iraq: a very minor offence in our terms, albeit an important one with regard to Iraq. He is facing a very long prison sentence or possibly a death sentence, so I want to hear from the Minister that he will absolutely commit himself to doing whatever we can through the consular service, particularly by providing English-speaking lawyers and



English-speaking support of one kind or another to try to either get him off or at least mitigate the sentence that he will have to face.

**James Cleverly:** I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about the professionalism of the Foreign Office's consular team. They deal with incredibly difficult and sensitive issues regularly. I can assure him that we will continue to work tirelessly to bring this case to the attention of our opposite numbers in the Iraqi Government. As I have said, it would be wrong for us to attempt to distort their legal process but we will of course help Mr Fitton's family to secure legal representation, including English-speaking legal representation, to give him the proper ability to defend himself in this instance.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the shadow Minister, Bambos Charalambous.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) on securing this urgent question today and on her tireless advocacy on behalf of her constituent, Jim Fitton. My thoughts are with Mr Fitton and his family, and I would like to echo the concerns raised by colleagues across the House. In March, Mr Fitton, a British citizen and retired geologist, was arrested in Iraq on a charge that carries the death penalty. He remains detained. As we have heard, he was part of a tour group visiting Iraq on an organised geology and archaeology trip. During the tour, the group picked up some broken fragments of stone and pottery from the ground. The fragments were out in the open, unprotected, and without nearby signage warning against their removal. Members of the tour were told that they could take the fragments as a souvenir as they held no economic or historical value. Mr Fitton's family have made it clear that, as a retired geologist, he would never in any way intend to disrespect or appropriate the rich and fascinating culture of the region; rather, he would celebrate it.

However, Mr Fitton awaits a trial date for sentencing, which is expected imminently. The window for intervention from the Foreign Office is therefore narrowing. Urgent Government action is needed, and the lack of engagement from Ministers is creating frustration for everyone who wishes to see the situation resolved. The Foreign Office needs to do everything it can to protect British citizens who are wrongfully detained abroad. I hear what the Minister has said about the consular support that has already been provided, but I would like to ask him what efforts the FCDO is urgently taking on behalf of Mr Fitton not only to secure a high-level meeting with judicial officials in Iraq regarding legal representation in order to resolve the case, but to engage with Mr Fitton's family. Does he share my concern that dragging his feet in cases such as these is resulting in public trust in the Government's commitment to protecting British citizens wrongfully detained abroad being profoundly impacted? As each day passes, this case becomes more serious and I urge the Government to take the necessary steps to allow Jim to be reunited with his family before it is too late.

**James Cleverly:** The FCDO visited Mr Fitton in detention on 23 March. He was arrested on 21 March. The hon. Gentleman, who knows I have a huge amount of respect for him, is frankly talking nonsense when he

talks about dragging our feet. We visited Mr Fitton in detention within days of his arrest, and we have visited him three times since then. As I have said, we have interacted with the ambassador to the Iraqi Government on more than weekly occasions on this issue. I completely reject the hon. Gentleman's assertion about the British Government's engagement on this issue. We are deeply engaged with this issue, and we will remain deeply engaged with this issue. As I have said, it would be completely inappropriate for us to seek to distort the Iraqi legal process, but we will continue to support Mr Fitton in his legal defence of the case against him, and we will continue to support his family through what we completely understand is a deeply distressing time.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), my near neighbour, on raising the case of her constituent. I accept that the Government cannot interfere directly in matters of this sort, but will the Minister understand that the mechanics of the criminal justice systems of other jurisdictions are not necessarily the same as we would expect in the United Kingdom? Will he contrast the approach to this problem by the UK Government with that of Germany, which appears to be far more involved at ministerial level?

**James Cleverly:** I previously held the brief for the middle east and north Africa, as did my right hon. Friend, and he will know that the UK enjoys a very close and strong relationship with the Iraqi Government at both ministerial and official levels. I completely understand his point about Iraq's judicial system being dissimilar to our own, but we must respect the judicial systems operated by other countries. We completely understand the concern of Mr Fitton and his family, and we will continue to engage as intensively as we already have to ensure that he receives a fair trial and has good legal representation. We do these things not because of questions in the House but because we believe they are the right thing for the UK Government to do to support British nationals overseas.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson, Chris Law.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): I welcome this urgent question from the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) precisely because action is not happening on the ground, notwithstanding the Minister's reassurances.

This is an unimaginably anxious and distressing time for Jim Fitton and his family, and I would like to send a message of support to them all on behalf of the SNP. Sadly, we know the FCDO does not have the strongest track record on ensuring the safe and swift release of UK nationals from foreign detention. The FCDO must intervene now, using every diplomatic avenue, to prevent the Iraqi authorities from sentencing Mr Fitton to death.

It is wholly disproportionate that Mr Fitton faces a potential death penalty for the removal of protected fragments of artefacts. His family have stated that FCDO Ministers are yet to lobby their Iraqi counterparts against issuing a death sentence. Is this true? If so, why is urgent action not being taken to safeguard a UK national? Finally, what is the FCDO doing to secure Mr Fitton's urgent release?

**James Cleverly:** I will not simply refer the hon. Gentleman to my previous answers, but when I have listed the British embassy's intensive engagement at the most senior levels with the Iraqi Government, including through a note verbale, it is a complete perversion of the situation for hon. Members to say that the UK Government have not engaged. We completely understand the concerns of both Mr Fitton and his family. We will continue to support him and them through this incredibly difficult time, and we will continue to engage with the Iraqi Government to ensure the right outcome for Mr Fitton, but we cannot, should not and would not seek to distort Iraq's legal system, as we would not accept that happening to us.

**Neale Hanvey** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): I pay tribute to and thank the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) for her work on this case. I express my support and solidarity with Jim Fitton's family.

Nothing is more important than consular services to support those facing injustice abroad. Jim Fitton's sister, Ruth, is my constituent, and she approached me over the May bank holiday to set out the situation that Jim and the family are currently experiencing. I wrote to the Foreign Secretary twice that afternoon, and I have yet to receive a response. I gently suggest to the Minister that his claims of urgency are certainly not reflected in the response, or lack thereof, I have experienced. I wrote to the Foreign Secretary to implore her to take action, and I have had no response, even though I made it very clear that we are in a perilous situation and that the trial date could be set for this week—I understand it will now be 15 May.

I support all the questions that have been asked by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Surely advocacy for a British citizen is not interference in another country's legal system. The family's lawyers are responsible for the legal case, and all the family are asking the FCDO to do is to endorse that case. Will the FCDO please give us a single point of contact—somebody that we and the family can liaise with—so that we are kept up to date on what is happening?

**James Cleverly:** The family have a point of contact within the consular system. The hon. Gentleman says that he wrote to the Foreign Secretary in May. Prior to his correspondence, we had already visited Mr Fitton in detention three times, we had raised his case with the Iraqi authorities and we had issued a note verbale.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his response. What steps have been taken to assess the adequacy of the food, exercise and light to which Mr Fitton has access? What steps are the UK Government taking, if possible with the Iraqi Government, to secure his release back to the UK under some system where he can then have access to his family?

**James Cleverly:** The hon. Gentleman raises a valid point. As part of our regular visits to Mr Fitton, we ensure that his circumstances remain humane and appropriate. We give advice on the remand system, on what privileges he might expect, and on social and welfare services. We also, of course, seek to ensure that he gets proper English language representation. Those are the things we will continue to do to support him through a case that, as a number of right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned, has not yet gone to trial.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I thank the Minister for coming to the Chamber today to respond to this UQ. What constructive action can the Government take to put pressure on Iraq to secure Jim's safe release or, at the very least, to have the abhorrent threat of the death penalty taken off the table immediately?

**James Cleverly:** As I say, in all our interactions with not just Iraq, but all countries that have the death penalty, we ensure that when we speak on this issue we highlight that we have an in-principle opposition to the death penalty. We will continue to make it clear to the Iraqis that we oppose the imposition of the death penalty, both in Mr Fitton's case and more generally. On support to his legal team, ultimately it would not be appropriate for the UK Government to take on a "quasi" role as legal representatives, but we will of course ensure that Mr Fitton does have appropriate and professional legal representation, in a language that he can understand.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) on raising this matter. There is a difference between consular support and ministerial support. My question to the Minister is: what is the point in all these visits if then when there are opportunities to actually do something useful, it does not get done? For example, Jim's lawyer sought to refer the case to the court of secession, as doing so would have, in effect, thrown the case out. At that moment, a supportive letter from the Minister would have made all the difference, yet it did not happen. Why?

**James Cleverly:** The hon. Lady is fundamentally wrong in her assertion. Our consular staff are the experts in this field. It is right that, whether it be the ambassadorial team in Baghdad or the consular team here in the UK, we apply the technical experts to problems such as this. That is exactly what we have done.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): The Minister mentioned in an earlier answer that there was a direct line for the family to contact officials. Will he confirm that that is an open line for the family to contact whenever they seek reassurance, as opposed to a line of reporting back on the Government's actions?

**James Cleverly:** As I have highlighted, our consular team are in regular contact with the family and had a meeting with them just today. I have no doubt that our team will continue to work with them. We recognise just how concerning this situation is and how fearful they will be because of these circumstances. Our consular team are experts in dealing with families in circumstances such as these, and I have no doubt that they will continue to liaise closely with Mr Fitton's family.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP): Mr Fitton is clearly not my constituent, but his former colleague Mark Smith is, and Mr Smith is bereft at his plight. Will the Minister impress on the Iraqi authorities the fact that Mr Fitton is far from some profiteering treasure hunter but is instead a deeply respectful accredited academic who would never disrespect Iraq or its artefacts? Will the Minister confirm that the Government will use all channels to try to impress on the Iraqi authorities the need for the most expedient and increased leniency in this case?

**James Cleverly:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that the UK Government, at every level, always seek to take the actions that we believe will best benefit British nationals overseas. I assure him that the level of engagement I have outlined in my answers will set the pattern for our continued engagement. We will of course seek to ensure that the legal process is conducted absolutely properly and that we support Mr Fitton and his family through our consular services throughout this incredibly concerning process.

## BILLS PRESENTED

### HIGHER EDUCATION (FREEDOM OF SPEECH) BILL

*Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80A)*

Secretary Nadhim Zahawi, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Dominic Raab, Steve Barclay, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Priti Patel, Secretary Michael Gove, Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, Alok Sharma, the Attorney General and Michelle Donelan, presented a Bill to make provision in relation to freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education institutions and in students' unions; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First and Second time without Question put (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 25 April); to be considered tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 1) with explanatory notes (Bill 1-EN).*

### ANIMAL WELFARE (KEPT ANIMALS) BILL

*Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80A)*

Secretary George Eustice, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Steve Barclay, Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan, Secretary Alister Jack and Victoria Prentis, presented a Bill to make provision about the welfare of certain kept animals that are in, imported into, or exported from Great Britain, and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First and Second time without Question put (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 25 April); to be considered tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 2) with explanatory notes (Bill 2-EN).*

### PRODUCT SECURITY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

*Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80A)*

Secretary Nadine Dorries, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Dominic Raab, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Michael Gove, Steve Barclay and Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, presented a Bill to make provision about the security of internet-connectable products and products capable of connecting to such products; to make provision about electronic communications infrastructure; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First and Second time without Question put (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 26 January); to be considered tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 3) with explanatory notes (Bill 3-EN).*

### ONLINE SAFETY BILL

*Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80A)*

Secretary Nadine Dorries, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Dominic Raab, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Priti Patel, Secretary Sajid Javid, Chris Philp, Julia Lopez and Mr Damian Hinds, presented a Bill to make provision for and in connection with the regulation by OFCOM of certain internet services; for and in connection with communications offences; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First and Second time without Question put, and stood committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 19 April); to be printed (Bill 4) with explanatory notes (Bill 4-EN).*

### HIGH SPEED RAIL (CREWE - MANCHESTER) BILL

*Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80A)*

Secretary Grant Shapps, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Dominic Raab, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Priti Patel, Secretary Michael Gove and Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, presented a Bill to make provision for a railway between a junction with Phase 2a of High Speed 2 south of Crewe in Cheshire and Manchester Piccadilly Station; for a railway between Hoo Green in Cheshire and a junction with the West Coast Main Line at Bamfurlong, south of Wigan; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time without Question put (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 25 April); to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 5) with explanatory notes (Bill 5-EN).*

### LEVELLING-UP AND REGENERATION BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Michael Gove, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, Secretary George Eustice and Steve Barclay, presented a Bill to make provision for the setting of levelling-up missions and reporting on progress in delivering them; about local democracy; about town and country planning; about Community Infrastructure Levy; about the imposition of Infrastructure Levy; about environmental outcome reports for certain consents and plans; about regeneration; about the compulsory purchase of land; about information and records relating to land, the environment or heritage; for the provision for pavement licences to be permanent; about governance of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; about vagrancy and begging; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 6) with explanatory notes (Bill 6-EN).*

### NATIONAL SECURITY BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Priti Patel, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Dominic Raab, Steve Barclay, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Elizabeth Truss, Michael Ellis and Damian Hinds, presented a Bill to make provision about threats to national security from espionage, sabotage and persons acting for foreign powers; about the extra-territorial application of Part 2 of the Serious

Crime Act 2007; about the award of damages in proceedings relating to national security and the payment of damages at risk of being used for the purposes of terrorism; about the availability of legal aid to persons connected with terrorism; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 7) with explanatory notes (Bill 7-EN).*

#### PUBLIC ORDER BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Priti Patel, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Dominic Raab, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, Secretary Grant Shapps, the Attorney General and Kit Malthouse, presented a Bill to make provision for new offences relating to public order; to make provision about stop and search powers; to make provision about the delegation of police functions relating to public order; to make provision about serious disruption prevention orders; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 8) with explanatory notes (Bill 8-EN).*

#### TRADE (AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Priti Patel, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Elizabeth Truss, Secretary Brandon Lewis, Secretary Alister Jack and Secretary Simon Hart, presented a Bill to enable the implementation of, and the making of other provision in connection with, the government procurement Chapters of the United Kingdom's free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 9) with explanatory notes (Bill 9-EN).*

## Debate on the Address

2<sup>ND</sup> DAY

*Debate resumed (Order, 10 May).*

*Question again proposed.*

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which was addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

### Preventing Crime and Delivering Justice

12.33 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel):** It is an honour to open today's Queen's Speech debate on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Keeping citizens safe is the first duty of any Government and, although it is not the only duty, meeting every other duty depends on it. Whenever fear and crime flourish, people cannot, and nor can our economy or our democracy. The Conservative party is the party of law and order. Unlike some, we understand that freedom includes the freedom of the law-abiding majority to go about their business free from harm. Those on the Opposition Benches are eager to defend the murderers, paedophiles, rapists, thugs and people with no right to be here. They cheer on selfish protestors who cause chaos and endanger lives. They back people who thwart the removal of foreign national offenders from our country.

In the last Session, opposition parties voted against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill and the measures to stop the likes of Insulate Britain ruining the lives of ordinary working people going about their daily business.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) *rose*—

**Priti Patel:** I will not give way. The right hon. Lady will have the chance to speak shortly.

Opposition parties voted against tougher sentences for killer drivers, greater powers to monitor terrorists, and an end to the automatic release of dangerous criminals. They are much less curious about the rights of everyone else to go about their everyday business free from molestation. It amazes me that the Labour party dares to hold a debate on crime just after having voted against the PCSC Bill. If Labour Members really cared, they would have backed the Bill.

This Government and this party back the police, our intelligence and security services and the law-abiding majority. We have reformed the criminal justice system so that it better supports victims and ensures that criminals are not only caught, but punished.

**Yvette Cooper:** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Priti Patel:** I will give way shortly.

While the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) voted repeatedly against boosting police funding, we have given the police the investment they need. An increase of £1.1 billion has taken the spending to nearly £17 billion a year.

**Dame Margaret Hodge** (Barking) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way. I want to engage not in the to and fro on which she started her contribution, but on a subject where I think there is unity across the House, which is in the fight against economic crime. Does she agree that if we are to be effective in fighting economic crime, we must have measures that introduce better transparency, that properly fund our enforcement agencies, because, at the moment, they are not fit for purpose, and that also hold to account the enablers of economic crime for the actions that they take?

**Priti Patel:** The right hon. Lady is absolutely right. I will come onto the forthcoming economic crime Bill, which speaks very specifically not just about how we do better and more, but how we target our resources to stamp out fraud and go after the permissive environment and the individuals who occupy that space and commit the most appalling economic crimes.

Since I became Home Secretary, an additional 13,500 police officers have been recruited. We are well on the way to our target of 20,000 more police officers by next March. Following the incredible response to our public consultation—

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I am extremely grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way. May I reinforce the cross-party nature of what the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) has just said? She will know that the right hon. Lady and I have done quite a lot in the House to support the points that she has just made. I very much hope that, when the right moment comes in the economic crime Bill, she will listen carefully to the work that has already been done to try to reinforce the very point that she has just made.

**Priti Patel:** My right hon. Friend is correct on this. I know that, for many years, he has been a champion of many of the reforms, some of which have been put in place. We have had part 1—the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022 and sanctions—but the next Bill will also tackle Companies House and many of the wider issues that have been raised.

**Andy Carter** (Warrington South) (Con): The Home Secretary has talked about the extra 13,000 officers recruited across the UK. It perhaps helps to break the figures down. Cheshire has had 189 new officers, and we are seeing results from those additional recruits. There has been a striking improvement in the number of arrests in relation to child abuse cases. Those officers increased from 10 to 46, and last month, we saw 28 extra arrests in Cheshire. Does she agree that that sort of increase makes a significant difference? It is not just about having fluorescent jackets on the streets; it is about the work of investigators tackling terrible crimes such as child abuse.

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is right. There are a number of points to make on that. I know that the Minister for Crime and Policing recently visited that team. First and foremost, when it comes to the most appalling crimes of child abuse and sexual exploitation, a number of significant measures were passed through Parliament in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, including tougher sentences, which, as I have already said, the Labour party voted against.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Priti Patel:** Let me make a bit more progress.

Following the incredible response to our public consultation, we published the violence against women and girls strategy. The Government have passed the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and launched the multi-year “Enough” campaign to challenge and change misogynistic attitudes. These are terrible crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls, such as domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking and female genital mutilation. Addressing them is our priority and responsibility. The Government’s rape review found a steep decline in the number of cases reaching court since 2016. One of the key reasons for this was the number of victims withdrawing from the criminal justice process, and in too many instances the criminal justice system has simply not been good enough and has failed victims. Across Government, my colleagues and I intend to transform support for victims by ensuring that cases are investigated fully and pursued vigorously through the courts.

**Karl Turner:** The Home Secretary talks about victims; why is crime up 18% but prosecutions are down 18%?

**Priti Patel:** I will come on to that as well, but first I want to speak about the rape action plan. We will increase the number of cases reaching court back to 2016 levels, which means reducing the number of victims who withdraw from the process and putting more rapists behind bars.

Crucial in how the Government will do this is not just money but investment in capabilities and the court system. The Government are investing over £80 million in the Crown Prosecution Service to tackle backlogs and recruit more prosecutors across the entire the country, because we need to start tackling this inequality. There is a significant inequality; that is in part a result of factors such as the way charges have been made and prosecutions brought, but there are other challenges as well.

**Yvette Cooper:** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Priti Patel:** No, I will not give way; the right hon. Lady will have a chance to speak. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Lady will have an opportunity to speak shortly. *[Interruption.]* If I may finish my point, I may come to her.

The other factor in terms of policing is the increase in the volume of digital evidence, and a vast amount of work is taking place across policing and the CPS now looking at how we can have an end-to-end approach across the criminal justice system to assess digital evidence. Also, for the first time the criminal justice system is now

[Priti Patel]

going to be held to account through performance scorecards through the crime and justice taskforce and also through the MOJ as well as the Home Office.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I thank the right hon. Lady for giving way. Is she aware, among student victims of sexual assault, of the use of gagging clauses and non-disclosure agreements in university non-contact agreements? I am in touch with various victims, particularly from Oxford university. One college, Lady Margaret Hall, has now signed a pledge to no longer use these but none of the other colleges has. Will the right hon. Lady join me and the universities Minister, the right hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), in asking other colleges to do the same, and will she consider meeting me so that I can relay to her the thoughts of victims in these cases?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. [Interruption.] I hear calls for more legislation from Labour Members, but, frankly, they also vote against all Government legislation. The hon. Lady raises a serious point. Through the crime and justice taskforce particularly, which is a cross-Government endeavour, the Education Secretary and other parts of Government are working with the MOJ to address and tackle these issues. The CPS has an important role to play here as well. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady and to speak to the universities Minister about this, because it is simply not right. Frankly, some of the practices being used are immoral, because they are effectively denying victims their right to have a voice.

**Yvette Cooper:** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Priti Patel:** No, I will not give way. The right hon. Lady will have the chance to speak shortly and there are, I think, 32 Members wishing to speak in this debate.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Priti Patel:** Yes, I will give way to the Chair of the Select Committee.

**Dame Diana Johnson:** I am very grateful to the Home Secretary. On the issue of convictions for rape and serious sexual assault, one of the recommendations from the Home Affairs Committee was to have RASSO—rape and serious sexual offences—units in all police forces. Will the Home Secretary ensure that all police forces now have those specialist units, because we know if that is the case, it is more likely that investigations will be more thorough, victims will be treated better and convictions will follow?

**Priti Patel:** The right hon. Lady is absolutely right, and she will be aware of Operation Soteria, which does that. I will come on to wider support through the courts system and independent gender violence advocates, but the system is working now in a much more joined-up way, which I am sure the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford will also welcome. These measures

have to be integrated not only with policing, but with the CPS, so that we have an end-to-end approach on prosecution.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The Home Secretary talked about passports. Constituents are telling me that the long delays at the Passport Office could both badly affect the travel industry and ruin family holidays. We need action now. Will she ensure the backlog is dealt with in the coming weeks?

**Priti Patel:** If the hon. Gentleman has a particular case, I have been speaking to other hon. Members—[Interruption.] No, please send it to me. There has been a problem with Teleperformance, the company that runs the helpline on this, but I would be happy to address his points. There is a great deal of work taking place operationally with Her Majesty's Passport Office in dealing with passports and applications, and we are about to have yet another record month of passport delivery.

The fourth round of the proven safer streets fund is worth £50 million and will help to reclaim spaces so that people across our communities and streets are safe. Alongside that initiative, the Government have worked assiduously to combat issues such as drugs and county lines. While we know that Opposition Members are weak on combating drugs, this Government have overseen the arrest of 7,400 people as part of the county lines drug programme, and 1,500 lines have been closed. Drug seizures by police officers and Border Force in England and Wales in 2020-21 increased by 21% on the previous year. The 10-year drugs strategy is underpinned by £30 million of new investment to tackle that scourge.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 backs the police with improved powers and more support for officers and their families in recognition of the unique and enormous sacrifices they make. It means tougher sentences for the worst offenders and modernises the criminal justice system with an overhaul of court and tribunal processes.

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act. When I brought to this House the Desecration of War Memorials Bill, she immediately picked it up and ran with it and included it in the policing Bill, despite the mocking from the Labour party, including the Leader of the Opposition, saying that we were trying to protect statues rather than war graves and the war memorials to our glorious dead. Thank you, Home Secretary.

**Priti Patel:** I thank my hon. Friend for his support in making the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill an Act of Parliament. It is through that work that we are now able not only to protect and stand with our officers and back the police, but to have tougher sentences for the worst offenders and to modernise the criminal justice system. The most serious sexual and violent offenders will spend longer in prison. The maximum sentence for assaulting an emergency worker has doubled, and whole-life orders for those who commit premeditated murder of a child will be extended. Those are all key features of the Act.

This Government are also investing £4 billion to create 20,000 additional prison places by the mid-2020s, and the GPS tagging of 10,000 burglars, robbers and thieves over the next three years will deter further offending and support the police in pinning down criminals at the scene of their crime. That is why this Government will not stop. The beating crime plan is exactly the plan to cut rates of serious violence, homicide and neighbourhood crime.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): If the Home Secretary will allow me to intervene, I co-chair with the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) the all-party parliamentary group on miscarriages of justice. We are looking at the real problems with forensic science since its privatisation. If we are going to catch more criminals and have a more effective criminal justice system, will the Home Secretary make it a priority to ensure that forensic science in every part of the country is as good as it can be?

**Priti Patel:** I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman and the work of that group. Forensic science and the investment that goes into it is absolutely crucial to making sure that justice is served, and that victims receive the justice that they deserve. I would be happy, perhaps with Ministers, to organise a meeting on this, because there is a great deal of investment and work in forensic science. That is primarily because crime types evolve, and, in terms of the way in which sexual violence cases such as rape take place, digital evidence needs to be treated in a very different way, with the time that digital downloads take and the implications for forensic use. We would be happy to meet and have further discussion, and perhaps share any information and any good practice that we are experiencing in this evolving area.

The beating crime plan includes £130 million to tackle serious violence and knife crime. This complements the improved stop-and-search powers that we have given the police so that they can do what is necessary to keep people safe. This law and order Conservative Government are introducing several Bills in this parliamentary Session that will further help to prevent crime and deliver justice. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act was a major step forward, but elements were frustrated by the unelected other place, urged on by Opposition Members. We will not be deterred from our duty to protect the law-abiding majority from the mob rule and the thuggery that we have seen. The public order Bill will combat the guerrilla tactics that bring such misery to the hard-working public, disrupt businesses, interfere with emergency services, cost taxpayers millions, and put life at risk.

**Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con): The public order Bill, as the Home Secretary knows, will be music to the ears of many residents in Ashfield. We have seen these eco whatever-they-ares with their little hammers smashing up petrol stations. Does she think it is a good idea to give them bigger hammers and other tools and put them to work seven days a week like the rest of us?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend, like me, believes in work, and that is effectively what we are doing in this Government—we are cracking on with the job, basically, in delivering on the British people's priorities.

It is important to reflect on this point: the dangerous nature of these protests should not be lost on anyone in this House. We saw in particular the recent Just Stop Oil protest, and there are other sites and oil refineries where these protesters impose themselves. It really is a miracle that somebody has not been killed or injured through the tactics that are being used. To give one example, in the county of Essex, £3.5 million was spent just on policing overtime to deal with those protesters, draining the resources of Essex police so that it could not protect citizens across the county, and at the same time it had to call for mutual aid from Scotland, Wales, and Devon and Cornwall.

Despite Labour and the Lib Dems ganging up to prevent those measures from being included in the PCSC Act, we will act to support ordinary working people because we are on their side. The public order Bill will prevent our major transport projects and infrastructure from being targeted by protesters and introduce a new criminal offence of locking on and going equipped to lock on, criminalising the act of attaching oneself to other people, objects or buildings to cause serious disruption and harm. The Bill also extends stop-and-search powers for the police to search for and seize articles related to protest-related offences and introduces serious disruption prevention orders—a new preventive court order targeting protesters who are determined to repeatedly inflict disruption on the public. The breach of those orders will be a criminal offence.

Modern slavery is something that rightly exercises this House. It is a damning indictment of humanity that this ancient evil has not gone away. This Government will follow previous Conservative Governments in doing everything that we can to identify it and stamp it out. The new modern slavery Bill will strengthen the protection and support for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. It will place greater demands on companies and other organisations to keep modern slavery out of their supply chains. The Bill will enshrine in domestic law the Government's international obligations to victims of modern slavery, especially regarding their rights to assistance and support, and it will provide greater legal certainty for victims accessing needs-based support. Law enforcement agencies will have stronger tools to prevent modern slavery, protect victims, and bring those engaged in this obscene trade to justice.

In response to Putin's appalling and barbaric war on Ukraine, this House passed an economic crime Bill within a day so that we could sanction those with ties to Putin. The UK is an outstanding country to do business in, in no small part because dirty money is not welcome here. An additional economic crime and corporate transparency Bill will mean that we can crack down even harder on the kleptocrats, criminals and terrorists who abuse our open economy. There will be greater protections for customers, consumers and businesses from economic crime such as fraud and money laundering. Companies House will be supported in delivering a better service for over 4 million UK companies, with improved collection of data to inform business transactions and lending decisions throughout our economy.

The Online Safety Bill will tackle fraud and scams by requiring large social media platforms and search engines to prevent the publication of fraudulent paid-for advertising. It will address the most serious illegal content, including child sexual exploitation and abuse, much of which beggars belief and is utterly sickening. Public trust will

[Priti Patel]

be restored by making companies responsible for their users' safety online. Communication offences will reflect the modern world, with updated laws on threatening communication online, as well as criminalising cyber-flashing.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Home Secretary has expressed her outrage and disgust at the crime and abuse that is to be found online. Why has her party done nothing about it for the past 12 years?

**Priti Patel:** First, the hon. Lady and her party spend a great deal of time voting against the measures that we do bring forward on this. Secondly, the passage of the Online Safety Bill will give her and her party every opportunity to support us in keeping the public safe through some of the new offences that will be brought in.

This Government were elected with a manifesto commitment to update the Human Rights Act 1998 so that we enjoy the right balance between the rights of individuals, national security, and effective government. The UK is a global leader with ancient and proud traditions of freedom and human rights. Our Bill of Rights will reinforce freedom of speech and recognise trial by jury. It will strengthen our common-law traditions and reduce our reliance on Strasbourg case law. Crucially, the Bill of Rights will restore public confidence and curb the abuse of the human rights framework by criminals. This is a welcome and much-needed update, 20 years after the Human Rights Act came into force, and it will apply to the whole of the United Kingdom. Human rights are not something that should only be extended to criminals. In what has to be the most twisted logic I have seen as Home Secretary, I have lost count of the number of representations I have received from immigration lawyers and Labour Members begging me not to deport dangerous foreign criminals. The Conservative party stands firmly with the law-abiding majority.

The most vulnerable among us are not murderers, sex offenders and violent thugs, but their victims. Our victims Bill will mean that victims are at the heart of the criminal justice system, that they will get the right support at the right time, and that when they report a crime, the system will deliver a fair and speedy outcome. The victims code will be placed into law, giving a clear signal of what they have a right to expect. There will be more transparent and better oversight of how criminal justice agencies support victims so that we can identify problems, drive up standards, and give the public confidence. We are increasing the funding for victim support services to £185 million by 2024-25. That will mean more independent sexual and domestic violence advisers and new key services such as a crisis helpline.

**Edward Timpson** (Eddisbury) (Con): I very much welcome the measures to put the victims code on a statutory footing, because these are very basic rights that need to be upheld for anyone who is a victim of crime. One of the other consequences of being a victim of crime is often the mental health fall-out from being involved in that crime and what follows afterwards—the trial or other matters. During what is Mental Health

Awareness Week, I ask: what can be done to add to the victims code to ensure that those who find themselves in that unenviable position get the support they need so that they can get their mental health back as well as the rest of their life?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend makes probably one of the most important points about support for victims, and also about how we can help victims to rebuild their lives and live their lives with confidence going forward.

Within this work and the framework is the question of how we integrate many of our mental health service supports and the NHS more widely. The funding for victims, particularly in the areas of independent sexual violence and domestic violence advisers, is just one part of that. Legislation is only part of the solution. It is about how we deliver integrated services within our communities and also how much of the triaging takes place, whether that is through police and crime commissioners, the Victims' Commissioner or even local policing, as well as mental health services in the community.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

**Priti Patel:** I will give way one last time.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. She mentioned £187 million, I think, for victim support. Will some of that money come to Northern Ireland? Will it be new money? Will it be part of the Barnett consequential? How will it filter through?

**Priti Patel:** Many of these issues are devolved matters, but this is such important work—a lot of good work is taking place through the integrated end-to-end approach, and also through the scorecards that we are now setting up—that I would be very happy for the hon. Gentleman to speak to our Ministers about best practice, learnings and how the work can come to Northern Ireland. There is, it is fair to say, a great deal more that we do need to do in Northern Ireland, and I know we have had these conversations many times.

The data reform Bill will modernise the Information Commissioner's Office so that it can take stronger action against organisations that breach data rules. We now have more than 490 Crown court places available for use, which is comparable to pre-pandemic levels, and more than 700 courtrooms that can safely hold face-to-face hearings are open across the civil and family justice system. An additional 250 rooms are available for virtual hearings. In March, we announced the extension of 30 Nightingale courtrooms, and we have opened two new super-courtrooms in Manchester and Loughborough. Furthermore, we are ensuring sufficient judicial capacity by expanding our plans for judicial recruitment.

The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 will mean that we can focus our support on those who need it most, not on those who can afford to pay the evil people-smuggling gangs to come into our country. The Act increases the sentences for those coming here illegally and means that people-smugglers face life behind bars. It also makes it easier for us to remove dangerous foreign criminals, as demanded by the British public but not by those on the Opposition Benches or those lawyers working to undermine the will of the public. The British public's priorities are those of this Government. We are



on their side, and we will continue to do everything we can by making this Act viable and workable and delivering for the British people.

We are hospitable and charitable as a country, but our capacity to support the more than 80 million people worldwide who are on the move is not limitless. Many Labour Members and others on the Opposition Benches do not seem to understand that, but we do. It is why we have developed our world-leading migration and economic development partnership with Rwanda to deter illegal entry. We are providing solutions to the global migration challenges that countries across the world are facing. As ever, we hear very little from the Opposition, who seem to support the same old broken system and uncontrolled migration to our country.

Two terrorist incidents highlight how we can never be complacent. The attack outside Liverpool Women's Hospital last year would have been a disaster, had it not been for the incredible quick thinking and courage of the taxi driver involved on the scene. The terrible murder of our dear friend Sir David Amess was shocking, but not without precedent. We have worked closely together, Mr Speaker, to tighten security for Members, and we will continue to do so, and this Government will continue to work with our Five Eyes partners to keep the United Kingdom and our allies safe.

The "National Cyber Strategy 2022" outlines my approach to tackling cyber-crime. We have terrorist activity committed online and information circulated by terrorist individuals and organisations. Going further, the G7 forum on ransomware launched new programmes, such as our work on economic crime, to counter illicit finance and commodities. Improving our international partners' ability to disrupt organised crime and terrorist activity is a priority to which this Government are committed.

In the past 12 months, we have completed a review of police firearms licensing procedures in response to the terrible and tragic shootings in Plymouth last August. New statutory guidance came into force in November. It improves firearms licensing safety standards and will ensure greater consistency in decision-making. The measures in the national security Bill will further protect our national security, the British public and our vital interests from those who seek to harm the UK. It delivers on our manifesto commitment to ensure that the security services have the powers they need.

The Bill represents the biggest overhaul of state threats legislation for a generation. We have world-class law enforcement and intelligence agencies, but they face an ever-present and increasingly sophisticated threat. The Bill gives them an enhanced range of tools, powers and protections to tackle the full range of state threats that have evolved since we last legislated in this area. It will also prevent the exploitation of civil legal aid and civil damage payments by convicted terrorists. The Bill enhances our ability to deter, detect and disrupt state actors who target the UK, preventing spies from harming our strategic interests and stealing our innovations and inventions.

The Bill also repeals and replaces existing espionage laws, many of which were primarily designed to counter the threat from German spies around the time of the first world war. It will introduce new offences to address state-backed sabotage, foreign interference, the theft of trade secrets and the assisting of a foreign intelligence

service. The Bill will for the first time make it an offence to be a covert foreign spy on our soil. A foreign influence registration scheme will require individuals to register certain arrangements with foreign Governments, to help prevent damaging or hostile influence being exerted by them here.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): Can the Home Secretary confirm whether the national security Bill will clarify whether it would have been inappropriate or unlawful for a Foreign Secretary to have met a former KGB officer, as we understand the Prime Minister did back in April 2018?

**Priti Patel:** If I may, I will not comment on that specific example that has been given. Actually, I think the focus should be on the legislation that is coming forward in this House, where there are plenty of debates to be had, rather than making a point like that. I think it speaks to how the Opposition treat matters of national security, and the disdain that they show to the significance of the threats posed.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

**Priti Patel:** I will not, because I need to make progress so that others can come in.

The national security Bill provides us with powers to tackle state threats at an earlier stage by criminalising conduct in preparation for state threats activity. It will also mean that other offences committed by those acting for a foreign state can be labelled as state threats and those responsible sentenced accordingly. When sentencing for offences outside of the Bill, judges will be required to consider any connection to state threat activity and reflect the seriousness of that when handing down a sentence. There is also a new range of measures to manage those who pose a threat but it has not been possible to prosecute them. The use of these measures will be subject to rigorous checks and balances, including from the courts, but we cannot be passive, sitting around until someone does something awful.

The Manchester bombing tore into the fabric of our freedom. It was a truly evil act that targeted people, many of them young or children, who were doing something that should have been a simple pleasure—attending a concert. The protect Bill will keep people safe by introducing new security requirements for certain public locations and venues to ensure preparedness for and protection from terrorist attacks. It will provide clarity on protective security and preparedness responsibilities for organisations as part of the protect duty, and it will bring an inspection and enforcement regime that will seek to educate, advise and ensure compliance with the duty. We have worked closely across Government with partners and victims' groups, and I pay particular tribute to Figen Murray and the Martyn's law campaign team for developing the proposals and working with us.

These Bills further establish the Conservative party as the party of law and order, as do all the actions I have taken since I became Home Secretary. The people's priorities are our priorities. Those on the Opposition Benches have only two responses, which they alternate between. Whether we hear splenetic outrage or total silence, their warped worldview means they have plenty to say about the rights of lawbreakers, but nothing to

[Priti Patel]

offer the law-abiding majority. We await their plan for a fair and firm immigration system that rewards those in need, not evil people-smugglers.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

**Priti Patel:** I will not; I am wrapping up. We await the Opposition's plan to beat crime. We await their plan for a criminal justice system that protects victims and punishes the guilty. We will wait in vain, while the Government get on and do the job of delivering on the people's priorities.

1.9 pm

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I have to say, that was an astonishing refusal by the Home Secretary to take interventions and questions from the shadow Home Secretary and a shadow Cabinet Minister. I have been taking part in Queen's Speech debates for 25 years and I have never seen a Government Minister at the Dispatch Box afraid to take questions from her opposite number—I have never seen that anywhere. She took questions from a few other Members; her predecessors always took questions from me. I wonder what she is so frightened of. All my questions would have been really factual—maybe that is what she was frightened of.

When the Prime Minister opened the Queen's Speech debate yesterday, he did not mention crime—not once. Those of us out on the streets talking to residents in different communities across the country—an experience that was probably rather better on our side of the House than theirs this time—know that crime and antisocial behaviour were raised a lot, but the Prime Minister did not mention them once.

The cost of living, soaring bills and rising prices were top of people's list, but they were followed by crime and antisocial behaviour and a real persistent concern that when crimes are being committed, too often, nothing is done. There was nothing in the Queen's Speech to tackle rising bills and rising prices and also no serious plan to tackle rising crime and falling prosecutions. There was nothing from the Prime Minister yesterday about the basic issues bothering people across the country.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. It was a shame that the Home Secretary did not want to give way to me, because I wanted to ask her why, more than 30 minutes into her speech, there had been no mention of a public health approach to tackling serious violence, which has a long-term plan, addresses the root causes and is joined up. Perhaps the Government want to be tough on crime and not tough on the causes of crime.

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend is right to talk about the public health approach and the need to prevent crime and work across communities to do that.

Across the country, in the last few weeks alone, I have heard from residents and victims talking often about there being no action when things go wrong; about repeated vandalism not being tackled even though there is CCTV evidence of who is responsible; and about the

victim of an appalling violent domestic attack who was told that it would not come to court for two years.

I have heard about repeated shoplifting where the police are so overstretched that they have stopped coming; about burglaries where all the victim got was a crime number; about scamming, where Action Fraud is such a nightmare to engage with that pensioners have given up trying to report serious crimes; about persistent drug dealing outside a school where nothing had been done months later; and about a horrendous rape case where the brave victim was strung out for so long and the court case was delayed so many times that she gave up because she could not bear it anymore.

I have heard about police officers tearing their hair out over Crown Prosecution Service delays because they know that the victim will drop out if they cannot charge quickly; about other officers who are working long hours to pick up the pieces when local mental health services fail but who know that that means that they cannot be there to deal with the antisocial behaviour on the street corner; and about women who no longer expect the police to help if they face threats of violence on the streets or in their homes. There is case after case after case where crimes are being committed but no one is being charged, cautioned or given a community penalty and no action is being taken—and it is getting worse.

Since the 2019 general election—in fact, since the Home Secretary was appointed—crime is up by 18% and prosecutions are down by 18%. The charge rate is now at a record low of 5.8% compared with 15.5% in 2015. Cautions and community penalties are down too, notwithstanding the Prime Minister and his Downing Street staff's attempt to make valiant personal efforts to get those numbers back up again.

The Home Secretary made an astonishing claim. She said:

“We have reformed the criminal justice system so that it better supports victims and ensures that criminals are not only caught but punished.”

Where are the criminal justice reforms that are pushing the prosecution rates up? The prosecution rates have plummeted on the Conservatives' watch, which means that under the Home Secretary and the Conservatives, hundreds of thousands more criminals are getting off and hundreds of thousands more victims are being let down.

**The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Yvette Cooper:** I will give way to the Policing Minister. I will also give way to the Home Secretary as many times as she wants, so that she can explain why prosecution rates have plummeted and cautions and community penalties have collapsed.

**Kit Malthouse:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. I understand the picture that she is trying to paint, but I know that she will want to give the House a balanced picture overall. I am sure, therefore, that she will want to acknowledge that in the latest publication on crime statistics by the Office for National Statistics, violence was down 8%, knife crime was down 4%, theft was down 15%, burglary, which she mentioned, was down 14%, car crime was down 6% and robbery

was down 9%. Although we acknowledge that the fight against crime is never linear, we should celebrate our successes, should we not?

**Yvette Cooper:** I am hugely relieved and glad that during lockdown, while everybody was at home, there were fewer burglaries of homes. I am also hugely relieved that during lockdown, while there were fewer people on the streets, there were fewer thefts on the streets. In April, however, the Office for National Statistics said:

“Since restrictions were lifted following the third national lockdown in early 2021, police recorded crime data show indications that certain offence types are returning to or exceeding the levels seen before the pandemic... violence and sexual offences recorded by the police have exceeded pre-pandemic levels”.

On overall crime, I am sure that the Policing Minister would not want to make the mistake that the Business Secretary made of somehow dismissing fraud, which is responsible for some of the huge increases in crime, and of saying that it is not a crime that affects people’s daily life. We know that it causes huge problems and huge harms, particularly for vulnerable people across the country.

**Mr Sheerman:** My right hon. Friend is coming up with some telling statistics. I have talked to constituents and the police, who say that morale has never been lower and their numbers have never been so small. Since 2010, Conservative Governments have diminished resources for the justice system more than for anything dealt with by other Departments. The balance is totally out, so the morale of the police and the confidence of my constituents have plummeted.

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I pay tribute to police officers across the country who are working incredibly hard in our communities to try to crack down on and prevent crime. They walk towards danger when the rest of us walk away. They are valiantly trying to hold things together, but too often, they are let down by the Government, particularly when dealing with violence against women and rape. The rape charge rate has gone down from 8.5% in 2015 to a truly shocking 1.3%. Today, in England and Wales, an estimated 300 women will be raped. About 170 of those cases will be reported to the police, but only three are likely to make it to a court of law, never mind the jail cell. Just think what that means.

That applies not just to rape, but to many other crimes. No charge are made within a year of the offence being committed in 93% of reported robberies, 95% of violent offences, 96% of thefts, 97% of sexual offences, over 98% of reported rapes and over 99% of frauds. It is a total disgrace. As one police officer said to me, “This is awful—it feels like once serious offences are effectively being decriminalised”, because there are no consequences.

**Dame Margaret Hodge:** My right hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. I want to move on beyond the police to the issues she has raised about fraud. Fraud is now the biggest crime facing us, and the cost to the economy is coming on for something like £190 billion a year. Does she agree with me that, as well as funding the police, it is absolutely imperative that we fund all the enforcement agencies fighting this sort of economic crime? While the Americans are raising the amount of money spent on this, we are lowering our investment into the enforcement agencies.

**Yvette Cooper:** My right hon. Friend makes a really important point, and we will pay the price if the law against economic crime is not enforced. The system just is not working. Everybody will know what a nightmare it is to try to report fraud; they may be passed from pillar to post, and sent between Action Fraud and the local police force. She is right, too, on some of the more serious issues, where this is also about the relationship between the police, the Serious Fraud Office and other enforcement agencies that need to take action. I hope this will be debated in our discussions on economic crime.

It is a really damning picture: crime rising while there is a shocking drop in prosecutions and action. But what is the Home Secretary’s response? Soon after she took up the job, she said:

“let the message go out...To the British people—we hear you... And to the criminals, I simply say this: We are coming after you.”

Well, to the Home Secretary I simply say this: “You’d better start running faster, because they’re all getting away.”

To be fair to the Prime Minister, yesterday his main Home Office focus was anger at the Passport Office, and that is probably something all of us can agree on, including the newly-weds who are having to cancel their honeymoon, and the hard-pressed families who face losing thousands of pounds that they had long saved up for a well-deserved holiday. Ministers told us the issue was being sorted out, but most of us can say from our constituency casework that it is getting worse. People are being badly let down, so the Prime Minister was right to be angry yesterday, although who does he think has been in charge of the Passport Office for the last 12 years?

The Prime Minister now says he wants to privatise the Passport Office if this is not sorted out. However, the immigration Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster)—told us:

“The private sector is already being used in the vast majority of the processes in the Passport Office.”

He also said:

“The bit that is not...is the decision itself.”—[*Official Report*, 27 April 2022; Vol. 712, c. 767.]

That leaves us back with the Home Office failing to get a grip on private sector contracts and failing to take basic decisions. It is part of the pattern of Home Office failure and the Prime Minister casting around to get someone else to step in. Ukrainians fleeing war have been waiting weeks on end for visas because the Home Office added long bureaucratic delays. So many desperate families have given up because they could not afford to wait; they have found somewhere else to live, and others to give them sanctuary instead. There have been 80,000 applications to Homes for Ukraine, but only 19,000 people have arrived.

**Lee Anderson:** The right hon. Member is being very generous with her time. She made a point about Ukrainian refugees; a family moved in next door to me two weeks ago. I would like to thank the Home Secretary personally: the family got in touch with me, and within minutes of my contacting the Home Secretary about them, her team had got back to me. The family is now in our

[Lee Anderson]

village of Kirkby-in-Ashfield. They thank the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and the people of Great Britain.

**Yvette Cooper:** The people of Great Britain have shown that they want to help desperate families who are fleeing Ukraine. However, the facts are clear: there have been 80,000 applications, but there are only 19,000 people here. The Home Secretary says that is because they are staying where they are. Yes, a lot of them are; they gave up because it became so difficult.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree with me about the really troubling reports—some of these are cases I have dealt with, but some of these I heard of through the media—of the Home Office issuing visas for only some members of Ukrainian families? The families quite rightly do not want to leave someone behind, so do not come here. That is classed as Ukrainians not taking up a visa, rather than Home Office failure. At the same time, the Home Office lines are bunged up. We cannot get through, and when we do, we are told, “I don’t even have a computer in front of me. I’m just on a phone line, and I don’t know what to say.” This is failure at the Home Office, and the Home Secretary has presided over it.

**Yvette Cooper:** My hon. Friend is right. I have also heard of cases where one family member does not get their visa, and of course the whole family has to wait. They are not going to be separated at a time of crisis. That Home Office Ministers think it is somehow a triumph to take four weeks to issue basic visas to people fleeing war in Europe is totally shameful.

It now takes more than a year to get a basic initial asylum decision, because the Home Office is taking just 14,000 initial decisions a year—half the number it was taking in 2015. This basic incompetence means that the backlog has soared, and so too has the bill for the taxpayer. It takes nearly two years to get a modern slavery referral, which means that victims do not get support and prosecutions just do not happen. No wonder that even the Prime Minister, who is not known for his laser-like focus on delivering policies, has lost confidence in the Home Secretary and is getting other people to do the jobs instead.

The Prime Minister is looking to privatise the Passport Office; channel crossings are to be handed over to the Ministry of Defence; Homes for Ukraine is to be handed over to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; and visas are to be handed over to the new Refugees Minister. Decision making on asylum processing is so slow that Ministers are in the ludicrous and unworkable situation of paying Rwanda over £100 million to take decisions for us. At this rate, crime will be given to the Ministry of Justice and the fire service will be given to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Under this Home Secretary, the Home Office has in effect been put into special measures because it cannot get the basics right. If the Home Secretary cannot get the basics done on any of those core decisions, she should get out the way and let someone else sort it out.

There is an alternative to this shambles. On crime and prosecutions, it was obvious a decade ago that this was where we were heading as a result of Government policies. I warned in 2013 of the risk of falling charge rates. I warned then about the Home Office’s failure to help the police tackle increasingly complex and fast-changing crimes, and about the risks if there was no proper, urgent plan to modernise policing, none of which has happened. I also gave a warning about what it would be like if the police were ripped out of the heart of our communities. Now, our towns, cities and rural communities are all paying the price; they all feel that the criminal justice system is not there for them when they need it.

Where is the action in the Queen’s Speech to turn this around? Where is the action to help the police modernise, so that they can keep up with fast-changing crimes? Where is the action on reform, and on raising police standards so that we improve confidence? Where is the action on getting justice and improving safety for women and girls? There is nothing on establishing specialist rape investigation units in every police force, nothing on establishing specialist rape courts to speed up cases and make sure that they have the expertise necessary, nothing on setting up the domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators register for which we have been calling for years, and nothing to establish a mandatory minimum sentence for rape—all things Labour has been calling for. There is nothing to tackle antisocial behaviour—the powers are just not being used. There is nothing to sort out community penalties, which are too often dropped, and nothing to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour. There is nothing to ensure that neighbourhood police are restored to our streets or to set up neighbourhood prevention teams, which Labour has repeatedly called for.

The Home Secretary wants to boast that she is delivering the biggest increase in police funding for 10 years—well, who has been in power for the last 10 years? She has not even restored the police her party cut and she is not getting them out on to the streets. There are still 7,000 fewer police in our neighbourhoods compared with 2015. Instead, the police are weighed down by more bureaucracy, stuck back at their desks doing paperwork—the only way to improve their visibility is to move their desks nearer to the window.

To be fair, the Government have proposed a victims’ Bill, and we would support that, but it is only in draft and it was first promised in 2015. It was promised again in 2016, again in 2017, again in 2019 and, yes, again in 2021. This year, it did not even get a proper mention in the Humble Address and there was certainly nothing from the Prime Minister yesterday.

The Home Secretary rightly made a personal commitment to strengthen victims’ rights back in 2014 when she first said that she backed a new victims’ law. She was right to do so because at that time 9% of cases were being dropped because victims were dropping out of the criminal justice system as they had lost confidence. Since then, those figures have almost trebled. Last year, 1.3 million cases were dropped because victims gave up and dropped out. Yet is she seriously telling us she does not have time in this Parliament for victims again? Instead, the Government’s top priority is a rehashed Public Order Bill, even though they have just done one, because they are again failing to work with the police to

sort out swift injunctions against serious disruptive protests or to help the police sensibly to use the powers that they have.

There are Bills that should command cross-party support. Labour supports a “protect” duty that could keep people safer from potential terror attacks. We remember with sadness all the victims of the Manchester attack. I ask the Government to listen to the calls from bereaved families from other major incidents, and I ask the Home Secretary again to look at calls for a Hillsborough law, which she knows have been made by Members across the House and by the families who have lost so much.

Labour also welcomes the long-overdue economic crime Bill. We have called for years for action to strengthen Companies House and we will be pressing for stronger action on money laundering, including illicit finance used for terrorist activity. On terrorism and national security, we always stand ready to work with the Government in the national interest. We agree on the need for a register of foreign agents, which, again, has been promised for years. We need much greater vigilance and action against hostile state activity. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) raised a significant issue that the Home Secretary did not answer, so I ask her to consider it and to be ready to answer it in future. There should be some transparency on the issues around contact with foreign agents. It would be helpful if she could confirm whether the Prime Minister, when he was Foreign Secretary, met the ex-KGB agent Alexander Lebedev in Italy in April 2018 and whether any civil servants were present. It would be very helpful to know that information.

Labour supports stronger action on modern slavery and hopes that the Bill will be an opportunity to go further, but the Home Secretary needs to reverse some of the damaging provisions from the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 that will make it harder to prosecute trafficking and slavery gangs, as the retiring Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner has warned. We must also ask: where is the employment Bill with the long-promised single enforcement body to crack down on forced labour and abuse? Without those measures, this is still not a serious plan to tackle modern slavery.

In the absence of any serious action in the Queen’s Speech on the cost of living or to push prosecutions up, the Government talked instead about levelling up and community pride. The trouble is, they just do not get it. There is no levelling up if people cannot afford to eat, cannot afford to pay their bills or cannot afford to go to the local shops. There is no community pride if town centres do not have police officers or see no action when there is vandalism, street drinking, shoplifting or litter—or if, too often, the windows are broken and nothing is done. How can people have that local pride if there are no neighbourhood police to help prevent crimes, solve problems or nip them in the bud, or if people feel that there are no consequences for criminals? The very communities to whom the Government keep making false promises about levelling up are towns that are being hardest hit by antisocial behaviour and persistent unsolved crimes.

Trust within our communities depends on us having trust in the law and trust in there being consequences. That is why Labour has called for the police to be getting back on the street and to have neighbourhood

prevention teams and partnerships in place that work both to prevent crime but also to tackle the criminals and bring them to justice. If people stop believing that a fair and valiant criminal justice system will come to their aid if they are hurt or wronged, that is corrosive for our democracy, too. That is why it is so damaging to feel like we have a Government who shrug their shoulders as victims of crime are let down. The Conservative party in government is not a party of law and order any more. Too often, it is a party of crime and disorder, a party that is weak on crime and weak on the causes of crime, letting more criminals off and letting our communities down. Britain deserves better than that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I remind everybody that those participating in the debate are expected to be here for the wind-ups. There will be wind-ups today and on subsequent days, unlike yesterday. I will not put a time limit on speeches at the moment, but I urge people to be at least aware of the length of their speeches.

1.36 pm

**Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con):** I support the Queen’s Speech and the programme unveiled by the Government. One can see politics getting back to normal and I am sure that the contest in the House today will be watched in the next two years as we glide to the likely date of a general election. Both sides are feisty performers and I am sure that many of us appreciate that.

The Government’s programme sets out to help grow the economy. It is for safer streets and for supporting the recovery of the national health service. The economy is in much better shape than one might have thought when we had the prolonged period of lockdown. We have a growing economy—this year it will be the fastest growing of many in the G7—a budget that is moving towards balance and falling national debt. There are challenges with the cost of living and inflation, but the Government have so far put in £22 billion of support, they are monitoring the situation and I am sure that, as things unfold, there will be further support as and when needed. One could never argue that the Government have not given support to the British people over the past two or three years. We must wait and see how things unfold on energy. Gas prices have fallen in recent months. Let us all hope that that continues and that inflation is lower than some predict. That is not to say that there are not challenges out there, but I think that the Government have proven that they can rise to challenges.

Some of the measures in the Queen’s Speech are useful to help and support the growing economy, in particular those to deregulate some of the EU regulations that we put into British law when we left the EU. Logically, we need to review them now to see if we can get ourselves a more efficient, more competitive economy. So I welcome the Bills that are looking at that area.

Of course, energy is a major challenge. It is my great pleasure to commend the Minister for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), who is doing an excellent job with his energy brief. The Government are grappling with issues such as nuclear power, oil and gas, and renewables to increase our

[*Sir Robert Syms*]

capacity. That is to be commended. Indeed, it is sensible, even if we are heading for net zero at some point in the future, that we use the resources that God has given us and which the British economy has proved able to get out of the ground. We are going to need oil and gas for a long time and the Government are proving that they want to make use of those resources to make us a richer and more competitive country.

Nuclear power is very important. We can see the mistake the Germans made in announcing the closure of their nuclear power stations and their dependency on Russian gas. We need to replace many of the Magnox stations that are going to go offline. This is an exciting time. I hope we get a decision on Sizewell soon. I am particularly pleased that Rolls-Royce has, with its partners, come up with a scheme for smaller nuclear power stations. I think that is going to be a game changer for the United Kingdom and it could be a game changer for exports to many countries that wish to avail themselves of safe nuclear power, so I think that is good.

There is one area, agriculture, that I am still a bit concerned about. I still think we seem to spend a little too much time talking about trimming hedges and less about producing food. One thing the pandemic and the current world shortages have proven is that resilience and local production are important. I would be very disappointed if the food we were producing reduced to below 50%. If anything, we ought to be producing more. I therefore think there needs to be a rethink in this area.

I am not a great fan of Bank of England independence. I have always been a little sceptical about it.

**Kit Malthouse:** On my hon. Friend's first two subjects, I wonder if he would reflect on the fact that both in terms of nuclear power and agriculture we have the freedom and flexibility that come from his and my vote to leave the European Union. On nuclear power, he will recall the blood-curdling predictions that we would fail in that particular industry by departing from Euratom all those years ago. Does he agree that, along with the French now, we can position ourselves as the only two serious nuclear powers in Europe?

**Sir Robert Syms:** That is absolutely so. The original design teams for British nuclear power were taken apart. To have a productive nuclear power industry, we need continued investment in new plants. The good thing about what has happened at Hinkley C, Sizewell and Rolls-Royce is that we are getting design teams together and collaborating with other partners. That will be a major game changer in terms of Britain being able to produce the power we need in future.

Going back to the Bank of England, I am a little concerned that it has merrily gone on printing money. I am old enough to still be a monetarist in its broadest sense. One of the reasons we have higher inflation is that we have allowed for it because of monetary growth. If we had stopped printing money sooner and put up interest rates sooner, the consequences of the current spike in inflation would be less severe. Nevertheless, we are where we are. At least it is only the European Central Bank printing money at the moment and Britain can get back to a more sensible policy.

We have very low levels of unemployment and high levels of employment. There are many other measures in the Loyal Speech. We are trying to improve education and outputs in that area. We really do have to educate our population, so they become more productive and we can get productivity up. If we get the investment and education right, there is nothing we cannot do in the future.

I thank the Home Office for the hard work it put in in the last Session. My constituents are very appreciative that we now have powers to deal with Travellers, who tend to cause problems every summer in Dorset. They are also pleased that we are starting to deal with illegal immigration. Immigration has to be fair. If people follow the system, pay the fees, fill out the forms and wait in the queue, it is fundamentally unfair that people arrive in boats and try to jump the queue. The Government are therefore taking action. A lot of the action will put off some of those people from coming in an illegal way, which I think is good.

I am particularly pleased with the public order measures announced today. My constituents look at people trying to wreck petrol stations and getting on tankers—taking action that is dangerous. I have to say that my sympathy was with the woman in the Range Rover who was trying to nudge protesters. A lot of people work hard. They try to get their kids to school and keep them in school uniform. They take people to hospital. Protesters who are not demonstrators but are disrupting other people's livelihoods need to be curtailed. The measures are therefore welcome and I am glad the Government are on the front foot when it comes to dealing with these issues. That is vital. Part of the problem and the reason we have to legislate is that we have seen examples of City banks where people outside have hit buildings and smashed windows with hammers, and, unfortunately, the judicial system has let people off. Sometimes the people who are making decisions in the judicial system do not understand the seriousness of where that leads. If we let there be some degree of anarchy, that can easily overflow and break out, so the measures are welcome.

Of course 13,500 police officers are welcome. I still think the police need some reform. It is the one area that Mrs Thatcher did not reform and sometimes the productivity we get out of the police force is not all that we need. We need some specialists in police forces, so I do not think that just the head count of police officers is important. It is important sometimes when dealing with fraud to deal with people who are experts in that, rather than people who just happen to be officers.

My final point is that we put a lot of money into the national health service. It is important we get the productivity. It is also important that it does not disappear and we cannot deal with care. We made a number of commitments. People are paying higher taxes, at least in the short term, to deal with the backlog and care. It is so important we live up to the pledges we made.

I welcome the Loyal Speech and what the Government are doing. I have one or two concerns, but broadly speaking I am supportive.

1.46 pm

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The debate today is about preventing crime and delivering justice. We heard the Home Secretary's claim, delivered without any sense of irony, to belong to the party of law and order, but this

Government's record is one of seeking out every opportunity they can to put themselves beyond justice and above the rule of law. We have had a decade of successive Tory Governments obsessed with chipping away at any institutions or activities that constrain or hold them to account: trade unions, charities, the Electoral Commission, our courts and, obviously, our EU membership. Now, it is human rights and protesters yet again in the firing line. To this Government even international law is almost inconsequential, broken quite readily, whether in a specific and limited way or by a complete trashing of the refugee convention.

This is a Government too often pursuing pet obsessions and short-term headlines instead of dealing with the basics. While people struggle to heat their homes and put food on the table because of the cost of living crisis, the Government, instead of taking the action we need, imagine up a Brexit freedoms Bill. Six tortuous years after the Brexit referendum, they are still trying to scapegoat Brussels.

There were newspaper reports of a Cabinet rebellion to stop imports of foie gras being outlawed. How about a rebellion to protect workers' rights or human rights, or to help our constituents to heat their homes and put food on the table? This is a Government who are out of touch. Those skewed priorities are just as evident in the sphere of justice and home affairs, with two Departments cut to the bone by a decade of austerity pursuing obsessions, pet projects and ridiculous headlines instead of taking the action and making the investment required to deliver the decent public services we need them to deliver. This Government are just not getting on with the job. People just want their passports delivered on time! Despite all the fuss made by Brexiteers, it does not matter what colour the passports are if they arrive too late. The Home Secretary very generously agreed to take away individual cases, but I think she will find that her inbox will be absolutely overflowing with thousands of emails if we take her up on that.

If the Government are to insist on Ukrainians applying for visas—we continue to argue that they should not—then they need to be delivered speedily and efficiently, because leaving those fleeing war in limbo is unforgivable. The Home Secretary seemed to talk up the fact that 19,000 had arrived here. I salute the generosity of the British people in opening their homes, but there are already 27,000 in Ireland, a country that is about one-thirteenth the size of this country. The bureaucracy put in place by this Home Secretary is not allowing this country to step up to the plate. In fact, the whole asylum and immigration system needs to be sped up, with decision making improved and the hostile environment ditched. For those who are victims of that hostile environment, we need an overhaul of the Windrush compensation scheme, because it is appalling that people continue to die without seeing a penny of what they are due. If the Government are serious about the lessons learned from that disaster, we need a more serious set of actions to implement Wendy Williams' recommendations, including a migrants commissioner.

All those very basic issues need to be addressed, but instead what we get in this Queen's Speech are further attacks on our rights. Before I turn to the main offenders in the legislative programme, let me highlight the Bills for which we will offer some support and bring some light to the Home Secretary's afternoon. An overhaul of espionage laws is badly overdue, as we know from the

Russia report, the Law Commission and various other sources. We need a more resilient state with espionage laws that are fit for the 21st century and able to keep pace with the ever-changing threats that we face. However, we will always watch out for proper oversight and mechanisms to ensure that the powers are not abused by Government, and we will press the case for a public interest defence.

We welcome the economic crime Bill. Again, that is long overdue, with my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), among the voices that have been calling for action for years. We have welcomed the online safety Bill and we recognise that it is now truer than ever that feeling safe requires regulation of the online as much as the offline.

We also support the ideas mentioned in relation to the modern slavery Bill, particularly around action on supply chains, but any modern slavery Bill worthy of the name should repeal some of the provisions of the odious Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which was passed just last month and which will undoubtedly make life worse, not better, for victims of trafficking, including those who face being sent to Rwanda. We will engage positively, though cautiously, with discussions about the Protect duty and that draft Bill. However, these are not the dangerous obsessions or pet projects to which I referred. Those come in the form of the legislation to meddle with the Human Rights Act and to undermine yet again the right to protest.

#### The Human Rights Act

"works well and has benefited many".

The Government know this as they were told so by their independent review body, which noted that many so-called problems with the Act are more to do with perception than reality, requiring a remedy through a focus on human rights education, not a radical overhaul. The Joint Committee on Human Rights has also done excellent work in highlighting the "enormously positive" impact of the Act on the protection of human rights in the UK, concluding firmly that no case for reform had been established.

This is about people being able to have a practical means of enforcing our human rights, challenging unlawful Government policies and securing justice. It is about ensuring that people interacting with the state, whether that is the police or in care homes or hospitals, are treated with dignity and respect. Our public services are better, not worse for being fully accountable to our constituents in the courts here, instead of their having to travel to Strasbourg to vindicate their rights. That is what the Government risk undermining and damaging, not delivering justice but seeking to protect themselves from it. We will oppose the proposals every step of the way.

The proposals tell us something much more fundamental about the British constitution, because the Human Rights Act is, after all, a piece of legislation that is absolutely crucial to the devolution settlements. That has not been recognised at all in this debate. Along with the Scotland Act 1998, it is absolutely fundamental in setting out what the Scottish Parliament and Government can and cannot do. It is the same for Wales and it is pivotal, too, for Northern Ireland.

Not for the first time, here is a Tory Government fixing up the balance of powers in the United Kingdom not through negotiation, agreement and endorsement,

[Stuart C. McDonald]

but unilaterally, without consent and absolutely without cause. In most states and most countries, such fundamental changes would require agreement; approval in all the impacted legislatures; sometimes even double majorities; sometimes even endorsement through referenda. But here in the UK, the Tories can rewrite the constitutional settlement to suit themselves in the blink of an eye, such is the lack of checks and constraints on them.

A Home Office focused on Scotland would tear up the immigration system that has served us so badly, left us without the people we desperately need for our economy and public services, and undermined the rights and security of so many of the people we already have welcomed. It would utterly reject an asylum system that is expressly and increasingly designed to make people suffer.

If we really wanted to prevent crime and deliver justice, we would overhaul the out-of-date Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which exacerbates one of the most persistent and difficult public health challenges that we face today. This is the scourge that is inextricably linked with so much crime, overcrowded prisons, serious and organised crime groups, county lines, modern slavery, drugs deaths and ruined lives. The Misuse of Drugs Act is not working and, in too many respects, is now undermining efforts to tackle all those fundamental problems. Even very obvious evidence-based policies, such as overdose prevention facilities, remain hugely difficult because of that Act. There were some very welcome steps in the Government's drugs strategy, but for real progress to be made, we continue to make the case for that Act to receive a radical review and overhaul.

Those are just some of the things that we desperately need from this Home Secretary and this Government, but they will never be delivered. They are a Department and a Government that deliver nothing of substance for the people of Scotland, instead undermining our rights and undermining the Scottish Parliament. This Government will not deliver. More than anything, this Queen's Speech shows us that we in Scotland need to get on with delivering for ourselves.

1.55 pm

**Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con): Preventing crime and delivering justice—surely if we get the first bit right, we do not need the second. That is wishful thinking, I know, but it is nevertheless true. Sadly, we do not live in a perfect world, so justice is needed, and the best justice is swift justice. Justice delayed is justice denied.

The legacy of covid lives on in so many ways. In the last Session, we did much to help alleviate the pressures on the justice system, but we will have to wait and see. We made new laws to protect our borders. To me, it never made sense to spend huge amounts of money on a justice system and to continue to let people come in illegally. Am I saying that these people are all criminals? Not necessarily, but it does not look good on anyone's CV. "How did you arrive in this country?" "Well, I gave a people smuggler all my cash and I hoped to beat the system." That is unacceptable. It had to be dealt with and I hope that what we have put in place will do just that.

We have given tougher sentences for many crimes, and even though I do not necessarily believe that a 25-year sentence will deter people from committing some of the devastating crimes that happen, it will at least keep them off the street for a much longer period and help the poor victim to move on. I welcome the victims Bill, too. That is the right thing to do, and I hope that it will make a huge difference to how victims are treated and hopefully encourage more to come forward.

Today, I want to talk about prevention. As chair of the all-party group on issues affecting men and boys, I am fully aware of the statistics about men and crime. Men make up 95% of the prison population—just let me run that by the House again: 95% of the prison population are men. If this was a statistic for any other demographic, there would be a public outcry, so why is there not? It is because that is what we have come to expect of a large number of our population. Some say, "Men are bad", but I say to the House: no, no, no—that is not true. Far too many men and boys are being forgotten, left behind and ignored, and they are now being increasingly vilified. We hear about toxic masculinity. Some say, "Impose a curfew on all men"—yes, that is what was seriously suggested—and "All men are bad." We cannot let that constant vilification happen. I say here and now that this has to stop.

We need to deal with this head on and ask ourselves the simple question: why? Why are men committing so much crime? Why are so many women being murdered, attacked and abused? Why are so many men being murdered, attacked and abused? Why? Do I have the answers to those questions? No, not yet—it is not simple—but we need to get there, and I believe that we could get there a lot quicker. We need help with that, such as through a Minister for men and boys, a Minister for their health and wellbeing, a national men's health strategy. If we are serious about fighting crime, let us tackle the causes as well as the symptoms. I believe that if we were to start asking those questions, we would protect our women and girls so much more. We would also protect our men and boys, but we must start asking the questions.

I have spoken with many people in my position as an MP and as chair of the APPG, and they agree that we cannot arrest ourselves out of all crime. Having more police is great, and we are getting many, but if every police officer were to go out on the beat, there would still be some streets without a police officer. It is great that we are lighting roads, but I am afraid that attacks will still happen on some of those roads and behind closed doors.

We have to ask why. Why is this the case? Is it drugs, alcohol, mental health or a bad childhood experience? What drove these people to drugs, alcohol or depression? Why are they not talking about their dreadful past? Is it the result of being the victim of sexual abuse or pornography? Is it the internet? Is it from being brought up in a dysfunctional family or a community that does not bring hope? Is it peer pressure or gangs? Why do young people join a gang? There are lots of questions, but there are answers. If we really want to protect one another, surely we should be finding those answers.

I wrote an article in *The Yorkshire Post* last week with an analogy:

"if out of every 1,000 cars we had three that were faulty... Would we ban all cars? Would we build more hospitals? Would we wrap every pedestrian in bubble wrap? No... we would try and find out what has gone wrong with the cars."



That is what I believe we should do with that small minority of men and boys. I have been told that as chair of the APPG I may get some opposition, but I can tell the House that I have not—not yet, anyway. The reason is that if anyone really thinks about it, they will see that I am trying to help society as a whole.

Who would a men's Minister speak to? Lots of men, hopefully, and lots of women too, but in this place I would expect them to speak to Ministers in the Department for Education, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—the list goes on. We need someone to see all the problems that men face, collate them all and then speak to the Home Office and say, "This is what's going wrong." It has to happen. We have to ask these questions, and we have to find the answers.

I have a wife, a daughter and a son. I want them all to go about their business safe and happy. We all want that, so let us use our heads. Yes, we want swift justice and long sentences where required, but let us try and prevent the crimes from happening in the first place. Let us see what has gone wrong with a small minority of our men and why they are in the criminal justice system or may end up in it. Then, when we know, we will need a concerted effort to fix the problem at source.

We need to fix the faulty cars before they head for the road. I know that the House will agree that we would find it hard to manage without cars. Well, we would find it much harder to manage without men.

2.2 pm

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): I do not often get the chance to speak in the House—being shadow Minister without portfolio means having a lot to do, but often without the opportunity to say very much—so I am delighted to be able to contribute to the debate.

The Home Secretary is just leaving the Chamber. This will not do either her or me very much good—I may even get chased from this place by my own colleagues—but in her absence I want to say that I like the Home Secretary. I also like the Minister for Crime and Policing.

**Kit Malthouse:** And we like you.

**Conor McGinn:** That will definitely not do me any good.

One thing I admire about the Home Secretary, even though I profoundly disagree with her, is that she believes in things. However, despite her virtuoso performance at the Dispatch Box today, I do not think that she believes some of the accusations that she levelled at the Opposition. I do not think for a second that the Government think that an Opposition led by a former Director of Public Prosecutions, who prosecuted terrorists and the worst sort of criminals and offenders and made sure that they were put in prison, are any sort of threat to national security. We can argue about policy, record and delivery, but let us not kid ourselves or the British public, because frankly they do not believe it either.

Before I come on to my main remarks about the Loyal Address, I want to place on record, given the topic of today's debate, my thanks to and admiration for Merseyside police, led by Chief Constable Serena Kennedy. We have been blessed in Merseyside with good leadership using all the tools to provide a robust policing response to things that matter to people in St Helens and across Merseyside, tackle the root causes of crime and antisocial behaviour, and give no quarter to those criminals who would terrorise our communities. I stand squarely behind our police force—the men and women of Merseyside police who put themselves daily in harm's way to keep us and our communities safe.

I turn to the wider aspects of the programme that the Government have set out, or the lack thereof. This was a gilt-edged chance for the Government to grab the cost of living crisis by the scruff of the neck. More than that, it was a chance to lay the groundwork after the pandemic, for prosperity and renewal across our communities and to set a pathway to the securer future that has never felt further away for many of our citizens, but is so badly needed.

The House will not be surprised to hear this, but I regret to say that I think the Government missed that opportunity. That matters, because this is not just about the theatre of the state opening. This is a profoundly worrying juncture for our country. Inflation is soaring and is predicted to rise further to some 10%, fuel and food prices are skyrocketing, and 15 of the tax rises imposed by this Government are hitting working people particularly. A national insurance hike—a tax on working people—is the wrong tax, at the wrong time, on the wrong people.

When I speak to residents, my neighbours in St Helens, their families, pensioners, businesses and local community groups, it is clear that this crisis is really affecting people and that they are really worrying about how they will cope. That was the stark reality that I heard from community groups in St Helens at a recent meeting that I convened with some of those who work with our community and residents who are affected. What they tell me is borne out by statistics from very reputable sources. Nine in 10 people have already seen a rise in the cost of living, are already experiencing more expensive energy bills, and are seeing more costly groceries on their weekly shop. Nearly a quarter of adults are finding it difficult to pay their usual household bills.

Worryingly, food bank use in St Helens North has risen by nearly 900 users over the past year, including 300 children—in the United Kingdom, in the 21st century, in a town like St Helens. This is not often cited, but our food banks are also wrestling with a 30% reduction in donations, because people who previously gave cannot afford to now because they have to look after themselves. Our transport costs are also rising, making it harder to get to work, see family and friends and stay connected. That has a huge impact on inequality.

Even before the crisis, a sixth of households in my constituency were in fuel poverty, so I was very pleased that a central plank of the Labour party's offer in the local election campaign was putting up to £600 back in people's pockets now by levelling a windfall tax on the excess profits of the oil and gas companies, which to all intents and purposes are printing money because of the increase in costs. At a time when the Government should be using every policy lever they can to deliver security, they had no answer this week.

[Conor McGinn]

As I have said before, our communities are resilient. We have been through a lot over the past two years—in fact, over the past 20 or 30 years—but people have come together to meet the challenges, particularly under the banner of St Helens Together, in a spirit of generosity, kindness and solidarity. Contrary to what some commentators wish to believe, communities in the north of England are not homogeneous and the challenges we face are nuanced, but our sense of place is important, as it is in St Helens. We are proud of that and remain steadfast in our ambitions for a better and securer future. That is why—this is a point that I have consistently made—it is not just about criticising the Government. Part of my job as an Opposition MP is to do that, but it is not enough.

I have agency. I am a Member of Parliament and a political leader, so just attacking the Government for what they are failing to do does not wash for my constituents in St Helens. They want to see action, so we are taking responsibility. As political, business and community leaders, we are addressing the big challenges facing our towns and villages in the Liverpool city region by regenerating our town centres through an historic, innovative £200 million partnership with the English cities fund; securing £25 million of innovative projects from the towns fund; investing record amounts in children's services and focusing on the next generation's educational attainment; and creating decent, secure and skilled jobs, training and opportunities through world-leading initiatives such as Glass Futures.

We are regenerating former colliery sites such as Parkside. They are not just a monument to those who worked there, proud as we are of that heritage. They are places that will create new employment opportunities for a whole new generation of people across our coalfields. We are revolutionising public transport, we are taking steps to bring buses back into public ownership, and we are seeking to “bring rail home” to where it originated, with the Rainhill trials, through our bid to host the headquarters of Great British Railways in our borough.

Our approach was endorsed again last week, when Labour increased its vote share in St Helens after its candidate stood for election on the basis of the party's record and an ambitious manifesto. It is now back, forming a new administration in our council with a strong mandate to continue.

Disappointed as I am—as would be expected—with what the Government have, or indeed have not, included in their legislative programme, that is not an excuse for me or anyone else to abdicate responsibility. I know that I have a job to do for my community, and we are of course taking responsibility, because we are proud of our past and ambitious for our future. However, I must stress to Ministers that people are worried. There are huge fears about the cost of living and what it means for their families, and that clouds the present and makes it more difficult to be optimistic about the future. I wish that the Government would do more to help me and my constituents in St Helens, but also to help people throughout the country. I wish that they would help us to get through the cost of living crisis, but also to push on with our plans to build a better and brighter future. If they do not, however, we in Helens will, as always, just do it ourselves.

2.11 pm

**James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): It is a great pleasure to be called. Law and order is a subject that is close to all our hearts, as has been made clear by the passionate contributions that we have heard so far.

I shall not speak for long, but I want to do two things. First, I want to provide a constituency perspective—a local perspective—which I think is relevant. Secondly, I want to explain why I feel that the crime prevention measures in the Queen's Speech are so important.

Bracknell is the safest major town in Berkshire, and the 21st safest town in the United Kingdom. That is a great accolade. These statistics, by the way, are taken from the website [crimerate.co.uk](http://crimerate.co.uk), and I urge everyone to look at them. The overall crime rate in Bracknell in 2021 was 60 crimes per 1,000 people. That compares favourably with Berkshire's overall crime rate, being 25% lower than the Berkshire rate of 75 per 1,000. East Berkshire is a pretty good place to live, offering good schools and good roads; we also have almost full employment. I am proud to represent those who live in my constituency.

Crowthorne is deemed to be a “small town” in this analysis, although it is probably a village. In 2021 the overall crime rate was 43 crimes per 1,000 people, 76% lower than the overall Berkshire rate. In Sandhurst, the overall rate in 2021 was 45 crimes per 1,000 people, 69% lower than the Berkshire rate. Finchampstead—which is certainly a village—is categorised as one of the five safest small towns or areas in Berkshire, with a rate of 36 crimes per 1,000 people.

The most common crime recorded in my constituency is violence against the person, including, sadly, sexual violence, so we have work to do. I therefore welcome a number of the measures in the Queen's Speech. I do not want to wax too lyrical about what we have already heard, and the Home Secretary has covered all the detail. However, I welcome the Public Order Bill, the economic crime Bill, the economic crime and corporate transparency Bill, the modern slavery Bill, the National Security Bill, the draft protect duty Bill and the Online Safety Bill.

Let me focus on three of the Bills that have been announced. The draft victims Bill will set out to restore victims' confidence that their voices will be properly heard, and that perpetrators will be brought to justice. That is very important to my constituents. The Online Safety Bill creates a new regulatory framework that improves user safety online while safeguarding freedom of expression, making the UK one of the safest places in the world in which to be online. The Bill of Rights, which has real relevance locally, will ensure that there is a proper balance between the rights of individuals, our vital national security and effective government, strengthening freedom of speech and our common-law traditions, and—rightly—reducing reliance on Strasbourg case law post-Brexit.

There are some additional issues to focus on. For instance, 13,500 new police officers have been provided so far in this Parliament as part of the manifesto commitment to put 20,000 extra officers on the streets. We are getting there. Thames Valley alone has gained an additional 368 police officers, with a further 233 projected for this year. That is great news for Bracknell, for Berkshire and for Thames Valley. The commitment to introduce a new drugs strategy is extremely important:

we need to break up county lines and criminal gangs, and help those who are struggling and are the victims of crime. So far we have seen the closure of 1,500 county lines, 600 operations against organised crime groups, and more than 220,000 drug seizures. Those are impressive figures, but we can go further. For the purpose of crime prevention, £200 million is being offered for a 10-year youth endowment fund.

I have already mentioned the Public Order Bill. It is so important for people to be able to go about their daily business and get to work, and for ambulances to get to hospitals. No one has the right to impede the way in which other people lead their lives, and those who chain themselves to railings and glue themselves to the road need to be in jail: that is a fact.

I welcome all these Bills on the basis of their inherent merits, and because they will make a difference. Let me end with three key points which are important to me locally, and to my constituents.

We need stronger powers to deal with antisocial behaviour, in terms of police response and in terms of arrest at the scene. We see a great deal of such behaviour in Bracknell, in the wider constituency area and throughout the United Kingdom. Antisocial driving is another feature locally. On Saturday evening, at Birch Hill Sainsburys in Bracknell, there was a big car meet. That is fine: I love cars. I am a motor sports fan, and I chair the all-party parliamentary group for motorsport. However, activities of that kind must be managed and controlled. People were spinning cars and doing “doughnuts”; there was tyre smoke, and there was a huge amount of noise. It reached the point at which residents were being assaulted. This cannot continue to happen. I would urge Sainsburys to lock its car parks at night when its stores are not open—that would be an easy way of dealing with the problem—but I would also urge Bracknell Forest Council, the Thames Valley police and crime commissioner and Thames Valley police to deal more responsibly with such incidents, which cause misery to all concerned. We must cut down on speed, on antisocial driving and on noise nuisance.

A constituent of mine, Luke Ings, was jailed at the age of 18 for affray. He is now 37 years old, and he is still in Durham prison. He has done his time, in my view. He is what is known as an IPP prisoner—imprisoned for public protection. He has been given an indeterminate sentence. I suggest to the Minister that we need to review IPP prisoners to ensure that we are not locking people up beyond the point at which they have been locked up. Luke Ings has done his time; let us please release him.

Young Stacey Queripel, aged seven, was found dead—murdered—in woods in Bracknell 29 years ago. I think we need to focus a bit more on cold cases and cold case reviews. I want to see more police resources given to investigating that particular crime, and all those like it. No one has been brought to justice for that murder in 29 years, and the family still live in Bracknell.

I am very happy with the announcements made yesterday, and I am very supportive of the Government. I think that the Bills will make a difference—but I also think we can go further.

2.18 pm

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): I appreciate being called so early in the debate, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Many people were looking forward to the Queen’s Speech—not just Members in this House but those who have been affected by the huge problems that have arisen as we have come out of the pandemic: the hospital waiting lists, the impact on the economy, and now, of course, the cost of living increase, as well as events occurring internationally, whether in eastern Europe or further afield. We wish the Government well in seeking to address those problems.

We will be critical of many of the measures, but it is important that the Government have highlighted the right priorities to deal with the cost of living crisis, which needs to be addressed very quickly. Many people are now struggling to meet the ordinary day-to-day expenses they face, not for luxuries but for basic necessities, and the Government need to act quickly by putting money back in people’s pockets. I believe that individuals are best placed to decide how they spend their money.

I understand the problem that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have outlined about huge debt and having to pay it back, but the inflationary pressures that have occurred over the last number of months have given the Government a windfall. They have given the Government finance that is available for tax cuts and, against a background of having imposed the heaviest tax burden on the people of this country since the 1950s, one way of dealing with this issue is to make immediate tax cuts. There is a benefit in doing that, in that it puts money in people’s pockets immediately. Also, not having complicated schemes would ensure that those benefits would be seen to come directly from the Westminster Parliament. One of my concerns about the Union is that the benefits that occur because of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland being part of the fifth biggest economy in the world are often hidden because the money is devolved down to the regions; we get complicated schemes, and the benefits are seen to come not from being part of the United Kingdom but from the actions of the devolved Administrations. The Government should consider how they can quickly address this issue and how they can ensure that people understand that the benefits have come because they are part of the United Kingdom. As a Unionist, I would advocate that the Government take that stance.

We welcome many of the law and order and justice initiatives in the Queen’s Speech. It is right that we address the issue of slavery, and I hope that that legislation will delve into the supply chains. Many of us obtain cheap goods because firms are careless as to where they source those goods. I do not want to get cheap clothes because somebody has been exploited in a third world country and the people who sell those goods have not looked into where the supply is coming from. I also welcome the initiatives on economic crime, and I hope the Government will recognise that it is not just those who engage in economic crime but those who assist them who have to be dealt with in the legislation.

As far as disruptive protest is concerned, I am not averse to protest—I have involved myself in many protests over the years of my political involvement—but we have to strike a balance between giving people the right to have their say about issues that concern them and at the same time ensuring that they do not deliberately, callously and selfishly deny others the ability to go about their business. I have witnessed at first hand the frustration of the good people of Canning Town, where I stay when I

[Sammy Wilson]

am in London, at being denied the ability to go to work. One guy said to me—I will not repeat his exact words because they were not very parliamentary—as we stood on a packed platform at Canning Town, “If I don’t get to work today I don’t get any wages, but those people sitting on top of the tube think that doesn’t matter and that their concerns are more important than my ability to go to work.” It is right that the Government should take action to ensure that those who engage in this selfish behaviour and who smugly think that their cause is more important than anybody else’s welfare are dealt with.

Of course, not all the measures will apply to Northern Ireland because many of these matters are devolved to the Northern Ireland Administration, but there are many other measures in the Queen’s Speech that will not apply to Northern Ireland because Northern Ireland is not treated the same as the United Kingdom. I looked at some of the things that the Prime Minister said yesterday. For example, he said that we were going to have measures to encourage economic growth and a bonfire of European regulations. In Northern Ireland, there will be no bonfire. There will not even be a matchstick in Northern Ireland when it comes to European regulations because we have stayed within the single market of the European Union. It would be illegal for that bonfire of regulations to apply to Northern Ireland.

That is one of the key ways in which the Government say they intend to level up economic activity within the United Kingdom, yet Northern Ireland will be exempt. The energy legislation that will be put through this House to deal with fuel bills cannot apply to Northern Ireland because Northern Ireland is part of the single electricity market, and any attempt to give support through the energy infrastructure would fall foul of the rules on state aid that apply to Northern Ireland. When it comes to support mechanisms, we have already had the example of the Chancellor being unable to fulfil the Conservative manifesto promise that when we left the EU, the Government would be free to reduce VAT on fuel bills. They could not do it. Why? Because that reduction in VAT could not apply to Northern Ireland.

I heard the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), saying yesterday that we could not possibly do anything to disrupt the protocol. In this debate on crime and the threat of crime it is important to remember that Northern Ireland’s different position in the United Kingdom is due to the threats that were made by the Irish Prime Minister, by certain political parties in Northern Ireland—some of which sit here; some of which do not—and, indeed, by some Members of this House that if we did not have separate arrangements for Northern Ireland, we would face violence in Northern Ireland. The protocol is the baby of threats of crime and threats to Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): My right hon. Friend has just mentioned the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead. Does he agree that she made an unfortunate reference yesterday that was inaccurate, in that she seemed to allude to the fact that we could have avoided this if we had backed her proposals, when in fact we would have

been in exactly the same position had GB diverted from the EU regulations? That was very unfortunate, and we have an opportunity now to rectify that error.

**Sammy Wilson:** Under the former Prime Minister’s proposals, Northern Ireland would have been subject not only to single market rules but to customs union rules, which would have meant that we could not have benefited from the 80 trade deals that the Government have now done across the world. Thankfully that is not the case; we still have access to those trade deals, and firms in Northern Ireland have benefited from them. Indeed, I can think of an example in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Paul Girvan), where a firm has set up exclusively to export the machinery that it will produce to the Australian market, as a result of the deal that we now have with Australia. There are huge benefits to being separate from the EU.

It is important to highlight that, as a result of the Northern Ireland protocol, many of the measures that the Government intend to introduce for the rest of the United Kingdom cannot apply to Northern Ireland. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) said yesterday, the Northern Ireland Assembly cannot possibly function until this issue is addressed. We are told that, without the protocol, Northern Ireland could become a hive of economic crime, because people would bring goods into Northern Ireland and smuggle them across the Irish border, contaminating the EU market. Of course, very little trade actually goes through Northern Ireland into the Irish Republic. Indeed, supermarkets that do not have shops in the Irish Republic are subject to these measures. What economic crime they will involve themselves in, I do not know. Nevertheless, that is the rationale attached to the protocol.

For the sake of good governance in Northern Ireland, this issue must be addressed. No Unionist in Northern Ireland will accept the divisiveness and economic damage of the protocol, which means there will not be consensus on the workings of the Assembly. If we do not have consensus, there will be all kinds of divisions, so the Assembly cannot possibly work. It is therefore important that this issue be addressed.

If justice is to be done for people in Northern Ireland, and if we are not to give in to the threats of criminal behaviour by those who are opposed to getting rid of the Northern Ireland protocol, the Government must take action. I am disappointed that no action was highlighted in the Queen’s Speech, but this is not solely a Northern Ireland issue.

I have already highlighted that we cannot change VAT on fuel bills, but there is another Bill absent from the Queen’s Speech. I believe there is almost universal support for improving animal welfare, as promised. Most people in the United Kingdom do not want to see the continued importation of hunting trophies from across the world. Whether Conservative or Labour, most people do not want to see the importation of foie gras, in the production of which birds are cruelly treated. I do not think most people want to see the importation of furs.

Those measures were not in the Queen’s Speech, even though the Government indicated that they would be. Why? Northern Ireland is part of the single market:

those things cannot be banned in that part of the United Kingdom, because Northern Ireland would become a back door. Many of these animal welfare measures are not in the Queen's Speech because of the Northern Ireland protocol. We have not even tested the state aid rules in the rest of the United Kingdom.

This issue needs to be addressed, and I implore the Government not to delay. There might be divisions in the Cabinet and the Conservative party, and there might be Opposition Members who really do not care that the protocol is having an impact on the Good Friday agreement, the stability of Northern Ireland and the ability of people in Northern Ireland to share the same benefits as the rest of the United Kingdom, but I assure the House that my party will do everything it can, on a weekly basis, to raise this issue with Ministers in the House of Commons and to use whatever leverage we have back home to ensure the political institutions are not contaminated by the Northern Ireland protocol.

2.34 pm

**Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con): Nobody should feel unsafe on the streets or in their home, which is why preventing crime is probably the most important part of this Queen's Speech. Each time we debate the subject in this place, the Labour party seems to side with the criminals. I am not sure why that is, but it seems to happen every single time. The Queen's Speech serves as a reminder to everyone that the Conservatives are the only party that is serious about law and order in the UK.

The vast majority of decent, hard-working people in this country will welcome the new public order Bill. Every week we see mindless people who have nothing better to do than wreak havoc on our streets, motorways and petrol stations. Frankly, the hard-working people of this country are fed up to the back teeth of these people disrupting lives and destroying property.

When I have been out and about, I have seen people gluing themselves to property, digging up lawns, throwing paint and performing zombie-like dances in the middle of the road with no regard for the decent, hard-working people of this country. *[Interruption.]* Zombie dances, a bit like Strangers Bar at night with my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis). These people have no regard for the decent, hard-working people of this country, and their guerrilla tactics are disrupting emergency workers and putting lives at risk. The public have had enough.

We were pretty good at handing out fines during lockdown. We dished out big fines, some justified and some not, and I hope the Government will consider handing out bigger fines to these public nuisances who think it is a good idea to damage petrol stations. I suggest a £10,000 fine, going up to 20 grand. That will teach them. Going back to their mum and dad with a 10 grand fine might be the deterrent they need.

Let us remind ourselves of what the Conservative party has been up to in government. We are recruiting 20,000 new police officers, and there are already more than 13,000 new police officers on our streets, making our streets safer. We have enshrined the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 in law, giving the police extra powers to prevent crime and keep dangerous criminals off our streets. The Act stops the automatic early release of dangerous, violent and sexual offenders, widens the scope of police powers such as stop and

search, and places a legal duty on local authorities to work together with fire and rescue services, the police and criminal justice agencies. Labour voted against the Act, and I will tell the House what else Labour voted against: everything in the Act.

In Ashfield we are really benefiting from a Conservative Government. We have just had £550,000 from the safer streets fund, with which we are putting up CCTV in some really dodgy areas of my town. This will make women and young girls feel safe. There will be safe hotspots where they can reach out for help. It is wonderful news for one of the most deprived areas of my constituency. We are using the fund to put up new security gates to secure alleyways, which are antisocial behaviour hotspots. The funding is making residents feel safe in their own home. It is real action. On top of that, we have new police officers in the Operation Reacher teams in Eastwood and Ashfield, which are going out to take the most undesirable people off our streets and lock them up.

The police had always been a little frustrated that the sentencing has not been enough for these criminals, but we have sorted that with the 2022 Act. People will be locked up for longer, and so they should be. It makes people in Ashfield and Eastwood feel safer, it makes me feel safer and it makes my family feel safer. When these criminals are arrested and taken through the court system, it is only right that they should be put away for as long as possible to make us all feel safe.

Labour also has no ideas about the illegal crossings by dinghies and boats coming over the channel. Labour Members seem to be confused, as they do not know the difference between an economic migrant and a genuine asylum seeker, which is a shame. My constituents in Ashfield would put them right. If Labour Members come up to my Wetherspoons in Kirkby, my constituents will tell them the difference—they are pretty good at it.

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): If, as the hon. Gentleman says, Opposition Members do not know the difference between economic migrants and, as he calls them, genuine asylum seekers, the Home Office does not, either. The Home Office has concluded that the vast majority of people in those boats are refugees and should be recognised as such. What does he have to say to the Home Secretary?

**Lee Anderson:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and I think that what she describes is the fault of the old, failing asylum system; when people get here, they know how to fill the forms out and they have these lefty lawyers who say, "Put this, this and this." So they fill the forms out and, hey presto, about 80% get asylum status, and it is wrong. It is a burden on the taxpayer, these people are abusing the system. It is a bit like some benefit cheats—they do it, don't they? They abuse the system, saying that they are disabled when they are not. *[Interruption.]* Yes, they do. Come on, let's be right about it.

Make no mistake: if that lot on the Opposition Benches got in power, perish the thought, this Rwanda plan would be scrapped within five minutes. They want to see open borders. They want to let anybody in. *[Interruption.]* However, I welcome the sensible comments on food bank use made by the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), who is not in his place. I would welcome any Opposition Member coming to

[Lee Anderson]

visit my local food bank in Ashfield, where I help out on a regular basis. We have a great project in place at the moment.

**James Sunderland:** My hon. Friend will know that there are two elements to most sentences: rehabilitation, which is important because we can rehabilitate criminals in prisons and put them back on the streets as, we hope, reformed characters; and deterrence. Does he agree that deterrence is an important function of any sentence and that longer sentences may well have the deterrent effect of saying to people, “Think twice before you commit that crime”?

**Lee Anderson:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, as he makes a perfect point. Not only is it a great deterrent, but the longer those people are locked up in prison, the longer they cannot commit these horrible crimes.

As I was saying, the hon. Member for St Helens North made some great comments about food banks. My invitation is to every Opposition Member: come to Ashfield, work with me for a day in my local food bank and see the brilliant scheme we have in place. When people come for a food parcel now, they have to register for a budgeting course and a cooking course. We show them how to cook cheap and nutritious meals on a budget; we can make a meal for about 30p a day, and this is cooking from scratch.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Can the hon. Gentleman answer a simple question for me: should it be necessary to have food banks in 21st century Britain?

**Lee Anderson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, as he makes a great point. Indeed, it is exactly my point, so I invite him personally to come to Ashfield to look at how our food bank works. He will see at first hand that there is not this massive use for food banks in this country. We have generation after generation who cannot cook properly—they cannot cook a meal from scratch—and they cannot budget. The challenge is there. I make that offer to anybody. Opposition Members are sitting there with glazed expressions on their faces, looking at me as though I have landed from a different planet. They should come to Ashfield, next week or the week after, and come to a real food bank that is making a real difference to people’s lives.

I will end now, because Opposition Members are not listening; these are a generation of MPs who never listen. The bad news is that this Labour party is out of control and out of touch, but, thankfully, it is out of power. That is me done, Mr Deputy Speaker.

2.43 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What I will say to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) is that all of us have food banks in our constituency and we do not need to visit his, because we are perfectly well aware of the requirement for them. They are required not because people do not know how to cook, but because we have poverty in this country on a scale that should shame his Government.

Before I address the substance of today’s debate and, in particular, the Government’s plans for a British Bill of Rights, like others I would like to refer to the results of the local elections last week, because in Scotland they were a very important reminder that this British Government have no mandate in Scotland and no mandate for any of the policies they are seeking to impose on my country in their programme for government. It is no surprise that the Conservatives lost so many votes and have been reduced to third place in Scotland. When I was campaigning on the doorsteps of my constituency, I heard over and over again the contempt in which this UK Government are held, not just because of the endemic law breaking, but because of the rank lack of respect for the Scottish electorate’s frequently expressed wish for a different way of doing things, and for a second independence referendum, following the broken promises of the first.

I am particularly proud that in the Pentland Hills ward of my constituency, my colleague and friend Fiona Glasgow displaced a Tory councillor and won yet another seat for the SNP on the City of Edinburgh Council. I congratulate her on the fantastic campaign that she ran. It is always so good to see women of independent mind elected to public office.

It was suggested by the Leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition yesterday that this Queen’s Speech has no guiding principle. He is right, in so far as it abjectly fails to make meaningful proposals to reverse the cost of living crisis, which is hammering my constituents, and constituents across the UK. There is nothing in the Queen’s Speech about cutting VAT on fuel bills; nothing about taxing big companies—not only energy companies, but others with excess profits; nothing to increase benefits; and nothing to reinstate the £20 that was cut from universal credit. I heard on the radio this morning that the Cabinet met yesterday to chuck around ideas to deal with the cost of living crisis but did not come to any conclusions. The lack of urgency and focus of this Government is as insulting to my constituents as it is callous. Nor does this Queen’s Speech contain any measures to compensate my constituents for the serial incompetence of the Home Office in respect of not just the handling of immigration and asylum cases, but the issuing of passports. Lots of working-class families in my constituency have lost out on hard-worked-for holidays and it is a disgrace. Will the Government compensate them?

I might not agree with everything the Leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition says—we disagree on the right of Scotland to self-determination, and I would like him to do more to stick up for women’s sex-based rights and the rights of same-sex-attracted people—but I consider him to be a man of integrity. I do not want to live in a state where the Government, with the assistance of their little helpers in the right-wing press, are able to influence the police to reopen a closed investigation into their political enemies. It stinks, and most of my constituents can see the difference between what seems to have been a working meal and the endless parade of parties, with suitcases of booze and karaoke, that took place at No. 10 during lockdown. People are not stupid.

Yesterday, we were told in the Queen’s Speech that this Government will ensure that the constitution is upheld. I had to struggle to stop myself laughing out loud. This Prime Minister cannot even uphold the

ordinary laws of the land, and in 2019 he rode roughshod over the constitution when he unlawfully prorogued Parliament. That was just the start of it, because in 2020 his Government introduced legislation designed to go back on an agreement they themselves had signed with the European Union, and they are still at it with the Northern Ireland protocol. I think this Queen's Speech does have a guiding principle: the principle of diminishing the ability of this Parliament and the courts to hold this Government to account. We see that in the Bill of Rights, the Public Order Bill and the Brexit freedoms Bill, which will expand Executive power to amend, appeal or replace EU retained law by way of secondary legislation, so that this House cannot scrutinise it properly. So much for "taking back control".

On the Bill of Rights, as was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), the Government's independent review of the Human Rights Act and the cross-party Joint Committee on Human Rights, of which I am a member, have found that the case for replacing the HRA with a British Bill of Rights has not been made out. The independent review suggested only very minor changes to the HRA, noting that the vast majority of submissions to that review spoke strongly in support of our Human Rights Act. But this Government did not even bother to address the findings of their own independent review, and instead published their own consultation on the day on which the independent review reported. This is extraordinary.

Yesterday, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who is not in his place and for whom I have great respect, even though I disagree with him on this issue, tried to suggest that the main reason for modifying the Human Rights Act is that it will give the Government the ability to deport foreign criminals who have been released from prison. In the recent thorough report on Human Rights Act reform by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, published on 13 April, we examined that claim in some detail and found it to be unsubstantiated by the data produced by the Government. For anyone who is interested, the arguments are set out at paragraphs 223 to 234.

The Joint Committee also found that the Government's case that human rights legislation is in serious need of reform is not proven. This is not evidence-based policy making. We concluded that the Government are purporting to solve non-existent problems and offering solutions that will cause only confusion and detriment to those who need their rights to be protected. We said:

"If the Government wanted to strengthen human rights they would improve how they are respected in general, improve education so that everyone knows their rights and improve access to the courts for those needing to enforce them. Improving awareness and understanding of human rights and access to the courts would have a"

far more

"beneficial impact"

than

"the government's current proposals."

Our cross-party report was agreed unanimously, so the Government should listen to what it says, as well as to the conclusions of the independent review that they commissioned.

There is of course a particular Scottish angle to the reform of the Human Rights Act, as was highlighted in a previous Joint Committee on Human Rights report, in which we recommended that any proposals to reform the Act should not be pursued without the consent of the Scottish Parliament. Again, that was the recommendation of a cross-party Committee, and it is in tune with the position of the Scottish Government. The Human Rights Act itself is a reserved matter, but human rights per se in Scotland are not reserved. We have our own Scottish Human Rights Commission, which has been A-listed by the United Nations, and it is very concerned about the Government's plans to replace the Human Rights Act with a Bill of Rights. Indeed, the Joint Committee on Human Rights is to take evidence on that this afternoon.

The Human Rights Act that we have in this country is already a Bill of Rights. Bills of Rights have two characteristics: first, they are universal, so the rights apply to everyone, not just the people to whom the Government find it convenient to give rights; and secondly, they are a higher law, which is why the existing Human Rights Act includes the section 3 interpretative obligation. If those things are taken out, as the Government propose, it will not in fact be a Bill of Rights. Everyone knows that the Tories—or some of them, at least—have wanted to get us out of the European convention on human rights for some years. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] They are cheering now, but the reality is that their leader signed an agreement with the European Union when we left it that means we cannot leave the ECHR. This British Bill of Rights idea is, then, actually just a sneaky way to try to diminish people's ability to enforce their rights under the ECHR.

So far this afternoon, nobody has mentioned the plans for a ban on LGB conversion therapy. I support such a ban, although I think the evidence for how much it is a contemporary problem is questionable. It was certainly a very serious problem in the past.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

**Joanna Cherry:** I will develop my argument before I give way. I am concerned that Members are coming under pressure to support a ban on what is described as trans conversion therapy that ignores the interim report of the Cass review and the testimonies of Tavistock clinic whistleblowers and detransitioners. There is an exponential rise in the number of girls seeking to transition. Many of those girls will be same-sex attracted; it is important that that possibility, and other explanations for dysphoria, such as autism, be explored in a respectful way with a qualified therapist before young women embark on a road to medicalisation. If someone experiences gender dysphoria in childhood or puberty, it does not necessarily mean that they are trans. Thousands of adult lesbians and gay men will, like me, know that to be true. It is really important that Members understand that "trans inclusive" means assuming that all children who say that they are of the opposite sex are transgender. It also means insisting that they do not need psychotherapy if they say they do not want it.

Hilary Cass, former president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, has been commissioned to report on NHS gender identity services for children.

[Joanna Cherry]

Her interim report, which was published a couple of months ago, has provided worrying information about the lack of normal clinical standards being applied to children with gender distress. More work needs to be done, but the interim results show that a high proportion of cared-for children, those with autism or experience of abuse, and children who would be likely to grow up lesbian or gay are presenting for gender services. I am advocating for evidence-based policy making. Let us wait for the outcome of the Cass report, and let us not be influenced by those who want to criminalise therapists who simply want to do their job and act in their patients' best interests. We urgently need proper, informed debate, in public and in Parliament, and it must centre on the wellbeing of children and young people.

We can have such proper, informed debates in this place and beyond only if we have free speech. The Tories say that they believe in free speech and want to better protect it as a right, but actions speak louder than words. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which was passed in the previous Session, the Public Order Bill and the Online Safety Bill all contain potential threats to freedom of expression. One of the problems with the Online Safety Bill is the introduction of a "legal but harmful" category for the removal of content. It will create a situation in which people are prevented from saying things that are legal but prohibited. There is a significant danger that, as drafted, the Bill will lead to the censorship of legal speech by online platforms and give the Government unacceptable controls over what we can and cannot say online.

As a former sex crimes prosecutor, I completely applaud the desire to protect children online that underlines the Online Safety Bill, but I am worried that the "legal but harmful" category will enable vexatious complainants to exploit the lack of definitional clarity to try to shut down lawful speech on topics of public concern on the grounds that it is "harmful" and should be subject to censorship.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the hon. and learned Member give way?

**Joanna Cherry:** I do not know; the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) wanted to intervene earlier.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** *indicated dissent.*

**Joanna Cherry:** I give way to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), then.

**Jamie Stone:** It is my lucky day. The hon. and learned Member is making a most interesting speech. When it comes to this Bill, does she agree that the weighting of primary and secondary legislation is worrying? Some of the definitions involved, such as those relating to freedom of speech, are so fundamental that they should be considered by this House, rather than nodded through in some instrument or another, whether under the negative or affirmative procedure.

**Joanna Cherry:** I do share that concern. I do not think it is safe to leave the setting out of definitions that will impact on free speech to a Government Minister—

particularly not one in this Government—in secondary legislation. I am most worried about the online platforms, because they cannot be trusted to police speech in a way that is properly cognisant of the law—not just law on freedom of speech, but law on freedom of belief, as well as domestic anti-discrimination law.

I shall draw my remarks to a close shortly, but let me take Twitter as an example, because this is really important. Twitter's hateful conduct policy does not include the protected characteristic of sex, so Twitter routinely censors perfectly legitimate contributions to the public debate on women's sex-based rights while routinely ignoring threats of violence and worse to women who participate in the debate.

In October 2019, the Joint Committee on Human Rights published a report on democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of association, in which we noted that Twitter has omitted sex from the list of protected characteristics in its hateful conduct policy. We recommended that Twitter remedy that, and in May 2019 a Twitter executive promised us that she would look at the issue; nearly three years later, nothing has been done. That is a real concern in respect of the Online Safety Bill, because when women have challenged Twitter's unfair and discriminatory moderation policies, Twitter has responded that it does not consider itself bound by the Equality Act in providing services in the UK. Twitter's argument is that because the company is established in Ireland as opposed to the UK, it is exempt under paragraph 2 of schedule 25 to the Equality Act. I am not sure that that is right, but it is a loophole that could be closed in the Online Safety Bill. I have already had informal discussions with Ministers about closing it.

To conclude, there is no point in saying that we need a Bill of Rights to protect free speech and then handing over the policing of speech to private companies such as Twitter, whose records show that they cannot be trusted. On free speech, the Government need to put their money where their mouth is.

2.59 pm

**Paul Bristow** (Peterborough) (Con): It gives me great pleasure, as it always does, to speak in this debate on behalf of the great people of Peterborough. This is the best job that I will ever have. Whether I have it for two more years or for 22 years, it will always be a pleasure to talk about the issues that concern the great people of Peterborough. One of their big concerns is about crime and disorder, and they would fully expect me to come to this place to talk about some of those issues.

I am very pleased to note that the number of police officers in Cambridgeshire is now at a record level. The recruitment target has actually been surpassed for the second year in a row. It is incredibly welcome that we now have more police than ever before. We have 145 new police officers this year. That is on top of the normal expected recruitment level and above the target. There are 1,671 police officers in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. They are on the streets of Peterborough right now, patrolling, preventing crime and doing the things that the people of Peterborough would expect them to do. I think 13,570 extra police officers have been recruited so far. That is above our 12,000 target, which is obviously good news for the country.



I wish to speak about three measures included in the Queen's Speech: the Public Order Bill; the British Bill of Rights; and the draft victims' Bill. First, on the Public Order Bill, one of the most popular pieces of legislation from the previous Session was the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. In a funny sort of way, I was delighted when I saw, as expected, Labour politicians opposing the Bill both nationally and locally in my constituency, because it showed them to be out of touch with the genuine concerns of the British people. Sometimes, Labour Members seem to think that Twitter is representative of public opinion. I have news for them: it is not. The people of Peterborough are hugely supportive of measures taken against those who glue themselves to roads, who disrupt ambulances and who disrupt hard-working people going about their ordinary business. Action against the mindless fools who do that is hugely popular in Peterborough, as are measures against unauthorised travel encampments, which currently blight the picturesque village of Thorney in my constituency, preventing people from using Thorney park for football games. The cubs were supposed to be using it this weekend for some activities. Unfortunately, the unauthorised encampment is preventing people from enjoying that public space, leaving rubbish, human waste and all sorts of other unspeakables in their way, and costing taxpayers thousands of pounds to clear it.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am enjoying the hon. Member's speech. This summer we were all frustrated that roads were blocked, and that ambulances and fire engines were not able to get through. However, does not he agree that the police already have the powers to deal with those things and that they should be using the powers they have, rather than adding others, which will restrict the rights of people in reasonable, fair, peaceful protest?

**Paul Bristow**: The hon. Lady makes a thoughtful intervention and I agree with her: often, I want to see the police act much tougher on people blocking ambulances and gluing themselves to the sides of the road. However, what these measures will do is strengthen the powers that the police have in order to get rid of those nuisance issues that she quite rightly identifies.

**Sammy Wilson**: Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that stopping people blocking roads, sending criminals back to the country from which they come and ensuring that people are not enslaved to produce the goods that we consume are just common-sense measures that most people understand and agree with?

**Paul Bristow**: The right hon. Gentleman is right. He identifies that hard-working people in this country completely agree with those sentiments and I am glad to be on their side. I ask hon. Members of the Labour party to do me a favour: please oppose the Public Order Bill because that will allow me to demonstrate to the people of Peterborough that, again, the Labour party is not in touch with them, their values, or their concerns. To do us all on the Conservative Benches a favour, vote against that Bill and give us an opportunity to demonstrate again how out of touch their party is.

Secondly, on the British Bill of Rights, I remind Labour Members that introducing that was a manifesto commitment—a manifesto commitment on which I was

elected and on which this Conservative Government were elected, with an 80-seat majority. We have to do this. We promised the British people that we would and I am thrilled to say that that is what we are going to do. It will rip up Labour's Human Rights Act 1998, which enshrined the European Court of Human Rights in British law. It will stop criminals dodging deportation through vexatious and continuing legal challenges. It will stop judges from Strasbourg overriding British judges, and it will protect free speech and press freedom. More important, it will also—I understand that human rights are important—restore public confidence in the law and in human rights, which is why it is such a welcome part of the Queen's Speech.

Thirdly, on the draft victims' Bill, I sometimes feel that the criminal justice system is not on the side of the victims of crime. The fact that we are looking to legislate on this shows that this Government are on the side of victims. We want criminals to be scared of the law. We do not want the law-abiding majority to be scared of criminals. Putting the victims' code on a statutory footing will ensure that victims' voices are heard.

A constituent came to see me in one of my advice surgeries. This local mum told me about her son and how he had been beaten up very badly in a bar in Peterborough. She described the experience of the criminal justice system as almost retraumatising. She was pushed from pillar to post. The very structures and resources that she thought were in place to support her and her son were found wanting. That really stayed with me. She felt let down and that they did not have enough support when it really mattered. In some exchanges, they were made to feel almost like the criminal, rather than the victims of the crime. We really must do better. The draft victims' Bill is designed to do just that, so it must be hugely welcomed.

As I said at the start of my speech, the people of Peterborough want us to be tough on criminals. They want us to ensure that we protect the British public and they want to see natural justice done. We had that in parts in the previous Session with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. As I have said, it was one of the most popular pieces of legislation in Peterborough. I know from some of the measures announced in the Queen's Speech that, again, Conservative Members and this Government have shown themselves to be in touch with the people of Peterborough and in touch with the British public.

3.7 pm

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What the hon. Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) said was very revealing, because he actually put on the record that most of this package of legislation is about party political advantage, posturing, setting up straw men and trying to create divisions that do not really exist, rather than trying to address the real issues facing this country, particularly the cost of living crisis, which I do not think he referred to.

What we have is the Government wasting parliamentary time, bringing back, with the Public Order Bill, the culture wars nonsense that we saw with the worst parts of the Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. At that point, it was about attacks on statues, which was very much based on what happened in Bristol. It is

[Kerry McCarthy]

interesting that the hon. Member talked about public opinion, but a jury trial acquitted some of the protesters by the Colston statue.

That was very much an attack on the whole Black Lives Matter movement. Although I did not agree with the fact that the statue was removed in the way that it was, we did not need legislation increasing the maximum sentence for damaging statues to 10 years. It was just about party political point scoring.

Now we have the measures on climate change activists. Again, the Government are trying to create a false divide. Most people, if we ask them, want to see greater action on climate change and support the right to peaceful protest, while thinking that the tactics used by some protesters are ill-judged, inconsiderate and counter-productive. People who are very much involved in the environmental movement share my opinion that some of the things we have seen do not help the cause at all. However, I am not convinced there needs to be legislation on this, rather than the Government working with infrastructure providers to obtain injunctions. Again, the reason is very much about headlines and trying to stir up antipathy. It is also interesting that the people who try to do that do not even manage to pay lip service to the need to address climate change.

**Kit Malthouse:** I am a little confused. Is the hon. Lady saying she is content for protesters to be brought before the court and punished either with imprisonment or a fine through an injunction process—a civil process—but would not support the same through a criminal process?

**Kerry McCarthy:** No, I did not say that at all. What I am saying is I think the reason the Government are bringing forward that legislation is suspect and I am not convinced that the police need these powers. I ask the Government to prove as the Bill passes through the House that the police are calling for these powers, because they were not calling for the increased powers brought in under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill; they said they did not feel they were necessary. It is now down to the Government to prove that the injunction system does not work but, as I have said, some of the protests are ill-judged and inconsiderate to people going about their daily lives, and I think we would all speak as one on that point.

It appears at first sight that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill is more about spin than substance. If it genuinely gives more powers to local communities rather than developers, that is good, although the Government's past action on this front does not inspire confidence. I hope that as we consider the Bill we can look at what has been happening. I have a case in my constituency where land originally used as meadows was designated for housing by a previous administration. The update of the local plan has been delayed, partly because the West of England has not updated its planning strategy. I think the Government rejected it. Therefore, even though we have a one-city ecology strategy that says we want to protect 30% of the land as green space, we cannot oppose the planning application on those grounds because the previous local plan is still in place. The Minister may have some experience of this sort of issue from previous roles. I hope that, when we get a

chance to discuss the Bill, we can talk about how we can ensure that planning rules take into account a city's desire to address the ecological crisis.

I would like to have a conversation with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities about architecture. His remarks on Poundbury, the village the Prince of Wales set up, were quoted at the weekend. On aesthetic grounds, I do not like Poundbury. I do not think it is brilliant architecture, so I disagree with the Prince of Wales and the Secretary of State on that. but in his comments, the Secretary of State set up a completely artificial argument, saying opposition to new housing development comes from

“a few modernist architects who sneer at what the rest of us actually like and people who dislike anything that seems small-conservative.”

That is not the case. The opposition to new housing developments is about people wanting to protect green spaces, thinking that infrastructure is not available and being worried about the impact on road systems and local facilities. It is not about people saying, “We would accept this new housing if the architecture was more modern.” That is just made up. It does not make for good political debate if people are constructing such straw man arguments.

The privatisation of Channel 4 is an unnecessary and spiteful move. Channel 4 is not broken and does not need the Government to fix it. Public ownership is not a straitjacket; the Government are trying to say it is. The channel invests more in independent production companies outside London—including Bristol, where it has one of its regional hubs—than any other broadcaster. Privatising Channel 4 could mean £1 billion in investment lost from the UK's nations and regions, with over 60 independent production companies at risk of going under.

**Christine Jardine:** The hon. Lady is making an important point. In my previous career I worked in an organisation which supported Channel 4 to encourage independent production companies across the country and help them enter the international market. It was clear from watching Sunday's British Academy film awards that Channel 4 is an integral part of our culture; does the hon. Lady agree that the Government should do everything they can to protect it, rather than try to change it?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I entirely agree: Channel 4 is doing a brilliant job and is financially viable, and there is absolutely no reason to seek to privatise it.

The long overdue Online Safety Bill received its Second Reading in the last Session. It is good that fraud is included; many of us will have had constituents who have fallen prey to scammers. It is disappointing, however, that, with so much of a delay in bringing forward this Bill and with its having gone through pre-legislative scrutiny, there is still so much room for improvement. The Government must focus on how harmful content can be amplified and spread, including through breadcrumbing, leading to there being more smaller sites, which often contain the worst content. As the Bill stands, such sites might slip through the net because the focus is all on the larger providers. I am also concerned that the definition of what is harmful to children will be left to secondary legislation rather than be set out in the Bill, that the Government have not accepted the Law Commission recommendations on self-harm, that misogyny

is not a priority, that state disinformation from countries such as Russia will still be allowed to thrive, and about much more. I hope we can significantly improve the Bill during Committee and on Report.

I welcome the renters reform Bill and the scrapping of no-fault evictions, but, again, there has been such an inexcusable delay. The legislation was promised three years ago and in that time the number of people in Bristol evicted from private rented property through no fault of their own has more than doubled.

The Mental Health Act reform Bill is another measure that has long been promised, but it is still only being published in draft. There have been some terrible stories about people with autism and learning difficulties being detained long term without their consent and a disproportionate use of sectioning for people from the black community. But this is a piecemeal measure; it addresses only one part of the problem. We know that mental health services are not fit for purpose and that many people are waiting far too long for diagnosis and treatment or are not getting help at all. We know, too, that children who need residential services often face being sent a long way from home, as beds are not available, and that far too many people resort to turning up at A&E in mental health crisis. There is a balance to be struck between giving mental health patients control over their treatment and making sure that people who would be helped by a stay in hospital get the support they need.

It was recently reported that freedom of information requests from 22 NHS trusts reveal that between 2016 and 2021 over half the 5,403 prisoners assessed by prison day psychiatrists as requiring hospitalisation were not transferred from hospital to prison. That represents an 81% increase in the number of prisoners denied a transfer in the previous five years. There is a very high threshold for that transfer request being met, so prisoners with major psychotic illnesses or chronic personality disorders are being kept in prison rather than getting the help they need. I suspect Conservative Members will think I am being a wet liberal on this, but this is as much about preventing reoffending as supporting the prisoners themselves.

There are quite a few measures missing from the Queen's Speech that I would have hoped would be included, including the animals abroad Bill and measures on trophy hunting. Given that we long ago accepted that the production of foie gras and fur in this country was inhumane and should be prohibited, there is no excuse now that we have left the EU for not acting to ban imports too. It just shows the warped priorities of this out-of-touch Government that they would rather give in to the demands of the pro-hunting lobby on their Back Benches—and some in the Cabinet as well—than enact one of the few genuinely popular promises they have made. Senior figures in the Conservative party have spoken out about trophy hunting and they have got lots of good publicity time and again, but where is the legislation?

**Sammy Wilson:** Regardless of whether we are supportive of the Conservative or Labour parties, or the Liberal Democrats or whatever, a huge majority of people in the United Kingdom want these animal welfare issues to be addressed, but does the hon. Lady accept that one reason why it would be difficult to implement any such

legislation is that Northern Ireland cannot be covered and will become the back door into the United Kingdom for anything we banned through legislation here?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I am thankful for the right hon. Gentleman's support for the animal welfare measures. Given that I have already spoken for rather longer than I intended to, I do not think I can unpick the Northern Ireland protocol today, but—[*Interruption.*] Well, there are not many Tories here, so maybe I can speak for another half an hour. I hope that as we come to talk about the future of Northern Ireland, we can look at the impact that the ban on imports would have and whether we can still proceed with it without completely upsetting the balance of politics there.

Finally, also missing from the Queen's Speech was any action to address the cost of living crisis. According to the Food Foundation, one in seven adults now live in homes where people have skipped meals, eaten less or gone hungry. Energy bills are skyrocketing, rising inflation is starting to bite and we have heard about the 15 Tory tax rises. It is the Government's responsibility to mitigate that suffering, whether through measures in the Queen's Speech or through introducing a much-needed emergency Budget. What we are seeing in operation is an active choice by the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Government to allow that financial pressure on households to continue.

A windfall tax on BP and Shell would hardly dent their enormous recent profits of £12 billion but, while my constituents remove items from their shopping baskets, spend their days on buses to keep warm and stress over bank balances in the red, the Government have refused to act. Even Tesco has come out in support of a windfall tax, and I think the boss of BP said that it would not stop the company from investing. Labour has been clear that the best solution to the cost of living crisis is a green one, yet this speech promised nothing to help insulate homes, which would lower bills and emissions. Nor did it promise to rectify this Government's nonsensical ban on new onshore wind.

To conclude, I look forward to debating some of the 38 Bills in the Queen's Speech. It is a massive missed opportunity; I hope that we see an emergency Budget soon and that the Government wake up to the real crisis they face.

3.21 pm

**Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con):** I was going to confine my speech to the Public Order Bill, but I will follow up on a few comments that the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) made. The more I listen to him, the more I think he speaks a good deal of common sense. I would like him to know that I for one, and a number of my colleagues, agree with much if not everything of what he says, and we have a steely resolve to make sure that we are one United Kingdom. That is what we voted for when we voted for Brexit.

My daughters, for some unfathomable reason, sometimes describe me as a grumpy old man. I really do not know why. However, there are a few things that can make me a little bit miserable, and one thing that has really grated on me in recent years is the minority of protesters who have pretty much used guerrilla warfare to disrupt the everyday lives of the vast majority of our constituents—not just mine, but everybody's.

[Marco Longhi]

The good people of Dudley North are ordinary folk, working hard to make a living, a living that is increasingly harder to make in the current climate. I cannot fathom how the privileged and entitled few think it is acceptable to stop our carers and nurses from being able to get to work to care for our sick and elderly, or to blockade a fire appliance from getting to a serious fire burning a local business to the ground—or, more tragically, perhaps preventing people inside the burning building from being saved. Of course, that applies to any blue light service, not just the fire service. That minority of criminals truly disgust me. They have no concept of the real world out there. They have no concept of the misery they bring to those less fortunate than themselves.

I hope that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and those on the Front Benches will join me in making working here more bearable for our staff, myself and my colleagues. I will not dignify his existence by tarnishing *Hansard* with his name, but there is a noisy man outside who dresses up as a clown and harasses and chases Members of Parliament and our staff from his little camp on the crossing island on Parliament Street. He is someone else who serves no public benefit whatsoever.

**Lee Anderson:** I know the character my hon. Friend alludes to, and I have witnessed some ferocious verbal attacks on my hon. Friend from that character, who patrols Whitehall like a public nuisance. May I suggest telling him that, if he is interested in changing things in this country, he should come to Dudley North and stand against my hon. Friend at the next general election?

**Marco Longhi:** In fact, that invitation has already been made. I am going to print off a set of nomination papers, but I wonder about the 10 people this person might need for the form to be valid.

My staff cannot hear distressed constituents on the phone through the awful racket he causes. All our staff who have offices in 1 Parliament Street suffer considerable stress and anxiety from the disruption he causes to their, and our, work. I doubt that staff in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the buildings opposite, would say anything different—[*Interruption.*] Is someone wanting to intervene? I do not know. I heard some noises. It is like a Hoover—an irritating thing in the background. I do not know what it is.

This person needs to have his loudspeaker system confiscated and to be moved on. Personally, I would like to see him locked up in the Tower with a loudspeaker playing “Land of Hope and Glory” on repeat at maximum volume. The Met Police really should deal with him. He is causing misery to hundreds of staff, he is intimidating many—

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** No, he's not!

**Marco Longhi:** I think someone wants to intervene, Mr Deputy Speaker. This person intimidates many who are passing by, going about our business and representing our constituents—

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** No, he doesn't!

**Marco Longhi:** Would the hon. Gentleman like to intervene?

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** The hon. Member clearly does not know how Parliament works, but we often make sounds across the Chamber when we disagree with someone, and I disagree with him. I am happy to swap offices: I will take his office and he can have my office. Then there will be no problem and we will not need to shut down free speech either. Win-win!

**Marco Longhi:** I am actually very comfortable for the hon. Member to come to Dudley North and make those very arguments, because he would be out of office completely. Please do come and make those very arguments. I am not going to allow this kind of behaviour from someone outside, who is a public nuisance, to force us to have to make changes for him.

Our police, whether in Dudley, the Met or elsewhere, need the tools to better manage and tackle the dangerous and highly disruptive tactics used by a small minority of selfish protesters to wreak havoc on people going about their daily lives. Our police already have enough to be doing without the unnecessary burden of a privileged few who seek to rinse taxpayers' money.

It will come as no surprise that I wholeheartedly support the Public Order Bill. If that disruptive minority want to glue themselves to anything, maybe the Bill should make it easier for them to have their backsides glued to a tiny cell at Her Majesty's pleasure. They would be most welcome.

3.28 pm

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): It would be customary to say that it is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi), but, without being personal in any way, it is incredibly frustrating, when we are facing a catastrophic rise in the cost of living, a war in Europe and an economy that is just starting to recover from the covid-19 pandemic, that this is the Queen's Speech we are dealing with today. It should have been full of ambition and vision for our country, but instead we have cynicism, half measures and a total lack of vision. We have an eclectic mix of Bills that is more about stoking division and setting up dividing lines. It does not come close to tackling the issues that the public care most about—the catastrophic fall in their incomes and the cost of living soaring as a recession looms.

The very beginning of the Queen's Speech talked about supporting the police to make our streets safer. We know the Government have no shortage of hard-line rhetoric on crime; we heard it from the Home Secretary earlier. Browsing the headlines on any given day, there is a good chance that we will see something about how harshly criminals will be punished if they get caught. But it is the “if they get caught” bit that is really crucial. After 12 years of Conservative cuts, the police, and the justice system, often do not have the resources to investigate even the most relatively straightforward crimes. The impact of this has been devastating. The antisocial behaviour that blights significant parts of our country, including my constituency, has effectively been decriminalised. The cuts to frontline policing and the criminal justice system have caused the proportion of reported crimes ending in prosecution to plummet.

**Kit Malthouse** *rose*—

**Catherine McKinnell:** If the Minister wishes to disagree with the very obvious statistics on this, he is welcome to; we would love to hear it.

**Kit Malthouse:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady. Obviously antisocial behaviour is an important issue across the whole country, and we definitely recognise that. In my own county of Hampshire, the police and crime commissioner has established an antisocial behaviour taskforce, using the extra resources that the Government have now provided for the third consecutive year. Has she had the same conversation with her own Labour police and crime commissioner to establish exactly the same kind of assertive response in Newcastle upon Tyne?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I appreciate that the Government state their commitment to the issue, but over the past 12 years we have seen an accumulation of the impact of public service cuts right across the board, whether in education, youth services or our police, sending the message to constituents across my constituency and elsewhere that people are getting away with it and very little can be done.

The relatively small increases in police numbers are not going to change that either. Northumbria Police has lost 1,100 officers and we still need 632 more to get back to 2010 levels, but replacing police officers is not going to take us all the way. Ministers have also shown very little interest in replacing lost back-room staff, who are essential to releasing that police resource on to the street. The Minister seems to think the problem is solved, but residents in my area, and right across the country, would disagree. We need to make community safety a priority, and that means more police out there tackling crime, antisocial behaviour and dangerous drivers: the things that they came into the force to do. The Minister's own Back Benchers have been calling for it repeatedly today. That means tackling the backlog in the judicial system—something that the Government have simply ignored and continue to ignore.

We know the distressing impact that antisocial behaviour can have on victims, destroying their mental health and impacting every part of their life. In the worst cases it can be life-ending. When I speak to people in my constituency in Lemington, Newbiggin Hall, Kingston Park, West Denton, Gosforth and Fawdon, they are very clear that what they want is greater support and protection from antisocial behaviour and crime, and greater strength and legal protection as victims. Yet victims are too often treated as an afterthought. The community trigger, which is supposedly the main instrument to support antisocial behaviour victims, is largely unused, and meanwhile support for victims remains a postcode lottery due to the lack of dedicated Government funding. It is disappointing that the long-promised victims Bill is still not enacted after being promised in no fewer than four Queen's Speeches and three manifestos. Putting the victims code on a statutory footing is so overdue, and I urge the Government to take up the Victims Commissioner's recommendation to include in it victims of antisocial behaviour. We must give them the same rights as victims of crime. We must end the postcode lottery in support for victims with proper dedicated funding.

Taking on crime is also vital to rebalancing our economy—or levelling up, as the Government like to call it. Crime not only leaves people fearful in our own

communities but damages the prospect of attracting people and businesses to areas that quite often badly need the investment. The levelling-up agenda itself seems up in the air, with little sense of the Government's priorities. The modest changes expected in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill simply are not enough, especially if the Government have already passed up the chance to transform northern economies by delivering on the long-promised eastern leg of HS2.

In the Levelling Up White Paper, the Government identify 12 missions to drive and measure change. I do not have time to go into them all, but take, for example, the mission of 90% of children meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by the end of primary school by 2030. We would all love to see it happen, but is it possible to achieve, when the highest performing areas currently do not reach 90%? It is hard to see how a Government who are presiding over half a million more children sinking into absolute poverty can possibly achieve that goal, given all that we know about the impact of poverty on achievement at school. Promises are one thing; delivery is another, and indeed there is no mention of child poverty at all in the Queen's Speech or in the Levelling Up White Paper, even though we know it accounts for much of the difference in attainment at school across the country and impacts on so many areas of life, including health, wealth and happiness. It has become a reality that must not be named, but in failing to do so, the Government are failing our children.

I will touch on transport, because the transport Bill will include long-awaited and much-needed measures to roll out charging points for electric vehicles. Making the shift to low-carbon vehicles will save drivers money, increase energy independence and clean our air. We know that nearly 40,000 buses on Britain's roads need to be replaced, both as part of the switch to zero-emission vehicles and to encourage people to switch from private to public transport with a new modernised fleet. The Department for Transport's target is to fund 4,000 zero-carbon buses in this Parliament, but 40,000 need to be replaced.

The DFT's approach of funding zero-emission buses through this ad hoc centrally administered funding pot, forcing local authorities to spend precious time and money writing bids, feels like an outdated and half-hearted solution, if I am honest, to the urgent problem of decarbonising our transport system. I often imagine my communities with full electrification of cars and buses, and think how quiet and clean the air would be. It is within our grasp; we just need more urgency, and we need to streamline the process of returning bus networks to public control, so that green buses can become integrated, efficient and accountable, like they are in major cities such as London. We want the same for Newcastle.

Fundamentally, we need to remove fossil fuels from transport. We need to make electric vehicles affordable for everyone and ensure that every community has the infrastructure to charge them. We need the right regulation and funding for a clean, efficient bus network, and we need investment in cycle paths and walking to allow people to travel safely. That is how we create safe and healthy communities.

Crippling energy bills and runaway inflation are hitting families hard, and the catastrophic fall in disposable income alongside the crisis in Ukraine will define our politics for the foreseeable future. The very first line of

[Catherine McKinnell]

the Queen's Speech should have acknowledged that we are living in a cost of living crisis and made a commitment to bringing forward a Budget to support households. Yet that is not what we got yesterday, and we are left with grudging half-measures previously announced by the Chancellor. That is scant comfort to constituents facing another increase in the energy cap in the autumn, when energy bills are expected to reach a staggering £2,500 to £3,000 on average. It is just not good enough.

Two and a half years into his premiership, it is not at all clear what the Prime Minister's guiding mission in office is, other than staying there at all costs. It is a remarkably thin policy programme from a Government with an 80-seat majority who tell us that they are going to level up our country. It shows a Government seriously lacking in ambition and far more interested in stoking culture wars that they think will benefit them in the next election, rather than supporting British people and British businesses through the multiple domestic and international crises we face. I will work with Labour colleagues to try and improve these Bills and the Government's programme, but frankly, after 12 years, it is time for a Labour Government.

3.39 pm

**Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who spoke passionately about the cost of living crisis and the problems we face that have not really been addressed by the Government's Bills.

First, in this new Session of Parliament, I will talk about the platinum jubilee. The Loyal Address has come weeks before this year's celebration to mark 70 years since Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth became the monarch of the United Kingdom and the head of state of other territories and countries. For me, it is particularly poignant because 20 years ago, at the golden jubilee, as a result of the efforts of people in Preston, the council, other stakeholders and me, Preston was fortunate enough to receive city status in the golden jubilee competition in which 40 towns across England competed. I do not know which town will be chosen this year but I wish good luck to whichever town it is and the Member of Parliament who represents it, because we have seen considerable investment in Preston as its profile has been raised through its city status.

Despite the joyous occasion of celebrating the Queen's platinum jubilee, the people of Preston and the country cannot help but be distracted by the real-time tragedy of the cost of living crisis that comes on the heels of two-plus years of hardship and sacrifice caused by the global pandemic. In the Queen's Speech, the Government made it clear that they are not interested in easing the pain of people who are suffering now and will suffer in months to come. Between last year's Queen's Speech and last month's spring statement by the Chancellor, no tangible action has been brought forward to address the cost of living crisis.

The country is in a state of emergency and on the brink of a potential recession, so people need help now. I echo the calls that the Government will have heard from Opposition Members for an emergency Budget to

try to address that situation. At a time when high inflation is outstripping wage and benefit increases, in conjunction with recent tax increases, this Queen's Speech is a missed opportunity to address the issues that matter most to people: their livelihoods and the future.

Today's debate focuses on crime and justice. The Conservative party fancies itself as tough on crime, yet it has a Prime Minister and a Chancellor who have been issued with fixed penalty notices for breaking laws that they wrote. Crime is up while criminal enforcement is down, with thousands of criminals getting off without being charged or held accountable.

The same is true for fraud and computer misuse, with online fraud soaring during the pandemic and before, yet few fraudsters are being arrested. According to the figures that I have, 416,000 cases of fraud have been reported in the last year and £35 million has been stolen as a result of that fraud, but only 156 fraudsters have been arrested. People may conclude from that that crime does indeed pay.

**Kit Malthouse:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want to acknowledge that, although he is right that fraud and computer misuse have been rising and have been included in the overall crime numbers in the last few years, quite a lot of those offences are committed by people who are operating internationally and online and who are, therefore, particularly difficult to bring to justice because they are in other jurisdictions.

**Sir Mark Hendrick:** I certainly agree with that point. In fact, as the Minister knows, there has been a big shift away from things such as car and telephone theft. Many people are now finding that their identities are being stolen and fraud is taking place as a result of computer crime, which is a big problem. We certainly see problems in cyber-space in terms of defence. I am pleased that the cyber-security centre is coming to Lancashire and hopes to do a great deal in that area. I am still quite bemused by the size of the resources being committed to police forces up and down the country to tackle this sort of thing, and the lack of wherewithal for Companies House to try to tackle fraud with businesses. I have had a number of cases of online fraud in my own constituency, about which I have written to the Government.

With the Online Safety Bill having been carried over into this Session, we have seen how delay has allowed disinformation to spread like wildfire online, particularly during Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, which obviously speaks to the point I have just made about cyber-crime and cyber-security. We want to see more effort on scams included in the scope of that legislation, to which I know the Labour party is committed.

The data reform Bill will reform the way data is handled in the UK after Brexit. The Government have said that the changes will help to increase the competitiveness of UK businesses and boost the economy, but reinventing the wheel by finding an alternative to the general data protection regulation just so the Government can claim freedom from so-called EU red tape is a waste of time. It is posturing really, and just creating new standards for data security is not going to solve any problems.

On the question of security itself, with the current state of affairs internationally, I think the Government need to be reminded of how critical national security is. We welcome the National Security Bill, and we want to

limit state threats activity in the UK. As has been witnessed in the Russian invasion of Ukraine and in state-backed interference in the UK before that, there are changing threats to the UK, and legislation on foreign interference must keep pace with the reality on the ground. We want better security and we support the National Security Bill, but we want this situation to be transformed quickly, with the cyber centre I have mentioned being constructed and the experts in there as soon as possible.

On the Public Order Bill, this should really be about tackling injustice. However, it is not about tackling injustice; it is about restricting further rights to protest in a legitimate way. There are extreme cases, as we saw here when people glued themselves to the glass in the Gallery overlooking the Chamber, but laws exist at the moment to deal with that sort of thing. The normal activity of demonstrations is something that, as a free country, we have come to expect, and if the Government are too heavy-handed on this, Bill will do a great deal more to cause problems by not allowing people to protest freely.

There is talk about an energy security Bill and how it will build on the success of last year's COP26 environment summit in Glasgow, with a pledge to build up to eight nuclear power stations and to increase wind and solar energy production in the UK. Again, I, as a Labour Member, and my party will support an energy security Bill. In particular, an increase in the provision of nuclear power is a no-brainer to me. Over the last 20 years—I do stress the last 20 years, and I would include the Labour Government as well—what we have seen in this country is a lot of talk about nuclear without much being done. I certainly welcome the consideration given to small modular reactors, which will provide very efficient nuclear power from engines that were originally designed to power nuclear submarines rather than provide power to the public. There is potential for great developments to see us move towards a carbon-free future, and not only in this country, but for exports abroad. In the area of my constituency, we have Springfields—formerly British Nuclear Fuels, but now part of the Westinghouse Electric Corporation—which is a world leader in producing nuclear fuels. I think the 1,000-plus people who work at Springfields can look forward to extra work if this Government and any future Labour Government are committed to delivering on the ground, instead of just the talk we have had over the last 20 years.

**Marco Longhi:** On the very point of small modular reactors, does the hon. Member recognise that the Government have invested some £220 million at Rolls-Royce? It is not just talk, as he asserts.

**Sir Mark Hendrick:** Yes, and Mike Tynan, formerly of Westinghouse, who is a good friend of mine—he still lives near Preston—has been involved through the Advanced Manufacturing Centre in Sheffield and done a great deal of work in the area. After 12 years, I am glad that the Government finally see the benefit of that for the future, but it has taken the instability of the wholesale energy markets to bring that about. I would have liked to have seen it much earlier in this Government's tenure or within Labour's tenure. It should not take a war for us to move in that direction.

On energy security, I am concerned about restarting the debate about fracking. In Lancashire, we had an experimental phase of fracking, and I was quite agnostic about it when the coalition were in government and the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), was the Energy Minister, but I am not now, because in moving from experimentation towards production we saw tremors measuring seven or eight on the Richter scale. At the time, we were told that any tremors above two or three on the scale would be dangerous and assured that the Government would look at whether work should continue, but now the Secretary of State is starting to look again at fracking. He argues that the wholesale energy market has brought that on, but the decision to put a moratorium on fracking had nothing to do with that; it was about safety in production. It was never a consideration to lift the moratorium because of energy prices. It is a desperate attempt to bring that dangerous business to certain communities—in the north of England in particular—when it is not warranted on safety grounds or, for that matter, on energy grounds. Nuclear can provide the extra energy that we need, so I support the Government in what they are trying to do on nuclear, but they are making a mistake if they think that they can revisit fracking. Labour welcomes steps for a low-carbon economy and the commitment to nuclear, and the impact that that will have on our energy independence.

Today's debate is also about justice and, when we discuss the delivery of justice, it would be remiss of us not to mention food injustice, which we see in this country at the moment. Justice is not just about what is happening in the courts; it is also about fairness and what is happening in society. I am a Labour and Co-operative MP, and one of the co-operative movement's founding principles is tackling hunger and food insecurity, which is critical in the face of a cost of living crisis. In one of the richest countries on earth, no one should go hungry.

Millions of people are affected by the cost of living, and in the UK 2 million people—mainly adults—have had a day when they went entirely without eating food. In this day and age, we should not accept that. We want a fair food Act that enshrines a commitment to zero hunger by 2030—a sustainable development goal that should be put into UK law—and a comprehensive national food strategy, but those were not included in the Queen's Speech. If we were really concerned about justice, people's ability to eat should be a priority, but the Government have not really considered that. It should have been in the Queen's Speech. We are also aware that as many as 16 million people may be in poverty by 2023, which is less than a year away, and, according to the Resolution Foundation, 1.3 million are currently suffering in extreme poverty.

While not specifically mentioned in the Queen's Speech, it is no secret that the Government are preparing new draft legislation to unilaterally scrap key parts of the Northern Ireland protocol, including chucking away checks on goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, stripping away powers of the European Court of Justice and eliminating all requirements for Northern Irish businesses to follow EU regulations. That all comes from a Government and Prime Minister who negotiated and agreed to the protocol. In September 2020, the Government were prepared to break international law in “a very specific and limited way”—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2020; Vol. 679, c. 509.]

[Sir Mark Hendrick]

when it came to the protocol, before backing down. Yet here we are again as global Britain, issuing thinly veiled threats to Brussels under the guise of protecting peace and stability in Northern Ireland, all the while jeopardising relationships with Dublin, Brussels and Washington, and any credibility we would otherwise have with international trade partners.

The Government are currently trumpeting the Australia and New Zealand trade deal, mentioned in the Queen's Speech, which they are looking to put through the House. The degree of trade we have lost as a result of the shenanigans over Brexit and what is happening in Northern Ireland at the moment is phenomenal. No amount of trade deals we are likely to do over the next five years will replace that loss. That is not what Brexit should have been about, according to the Government's own declarations in the run-up to the referendum.

The Prime Minister said that the Brexit freedoms Bill, mentioned yesterday, would allow the UK to "get on with growing our economy by making the most of our Brexit freedoms".

by liberating the economy in the wake of the UK's departure from the EU. Yet by overturning the protocol, the UK risks the possibility of trade retaliation during a cost of living crisis, which is a perfect storm in terms of the livelihoods of people in this country and the businesses that support those livelihoods. We are just now beginning to see the fallout from Brexit. We would have seen the fallout earlier but for covid, and now the effects of covid are being masked by increases in energy prices as a result of the Ukraine war. The cost of living crisis has several factors, which I have just mentioned. The Government are returning to the 2019 playbook of using the EU as a bogeyman following last week's dismal election results, but people know the ruse and are tired of being taken for fools when it comes to Brexit and its so-called benefits.

The country cannot continue like this, with a cost of living crisis and the Government sleepwalking with a threadbare Queen's Speech that will do little or nothing to improve the livelihoods and living standards of the people of this country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. We are not under huge time constraints today, which is unusual, so I will not put a time limit on. We will leave it up to people to judge for themselves how long they should speak, but I should just give an indication that 10 minutes is usually the maximum for a Back-Bench speech for all sorts of reasons that I do not need to explain to anyone who feels the atmosphere of this Chamber.

**Kit Malthouse:** She's talking about you, Lloyd.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Mine is shorter, but I will extend it now. [Laughter.]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** We do not normally have heckling on this point. [Laughter.] It's all right. The hon. Gentlemen on both sides are forgiven. It is nice and lively.

3.58 pm

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure, an unusual pleasure, for me to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Sir Mark Hendrick). Perhaps the Government have not been able to muster enough MPs to speak in support of their legislative programme and defend it—perhaps because it is impossible to defend.

The problems our constituents face are grave and numerous: a snowballing cost of living crisis, stagnated growth, energy bills soaring by 54%, inflation at a 30-year high, the tax burden at a 50-year high, record-length NHS waiting lists and criminal prosecutions at an all-time low. The logbook of Tory failures grows more comprehensive by the day.

Our inboxes are full of correspondence from people who are struggling to make ends meet. There are schoolchildren who have to go hungry in the holidays and pensioners who are forced to choose between heating and eating—the same pensioners who suffered yet another of the Government's broken promises when they ditched the pledge to maintain the triple lock on pensions. More than 2 million adults across the UK have gone without food for a whole day over the past month because they simply cannot afford to eat. It is a national scandal that brings shame on the Government.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot, a public health expert at University College London, said it best:

"If one household in seven is food insecure, society is failing in a fundamental way. These figures on food insecurity are all the more chilling because the problem is solvable. But, far from being solved, it is getting worse."

In a Queen's Speech with 38 Bills, there was nothing that would help to address the worsening cost of living crisis. In the face of the obvious need for ambitious reform and support, the Government have offered nothing in response.

It is no wonder that our regional newspaper, *The Northern Echo*, ran the headline today, "Have they run out of ideas?" The answer is an overwhelming, "Yes, they have," and the people of Hartlepool agree. Last week, they cast 8,316 votes for the Labour party and 6,487 for the Government's party. The Government have even dropped plans for the employment Bill that was promised in the last Queen's Speech. That means that at a time when everyone is straining to make their pay packet go further and they need their wages to be protected, the Government have rolled over at the feet of the likes of P&O Ferries and others who fire and rehire at will, screwing down wages and treating loyal workers like dirt. Of course, there is nothing about slave labour in the Bills either.

The Queen's Speech lacked any of the real substance needed to address the challenges that the UK faces. Sadly, we know that that deficiency of leadership in Government will hit low-income families hardest. Regions such as mine, where income levels are the lowest in the country and poverty rates are among the highest, will bear the brunt of the crisis.

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities—he of the funny voices on television this morning—even admitted in the media over the weekend that the Government-created cost of living crisis will further entrench the existing inequalities across our regions. In some ways, that is no surprise. We know



from experience that inequalities widen when the Conservatives are in power. By their own admission, their economic mismanagement has now made it more difficult to achieve their flagship policy of levelling up.

As we have long suspected, the Government's apparent commitment to supporting growth in our regions is nothing more than bluster and electioneering, and they completely lack the ambition and will to do so. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill in the Queen's Speech is inexplicably thin. With so much inequality ripe to be addressed, it is ridiculous that getting the funding needed is a lottery for local authorities.

In the place of bold reforms, we have a centralised pot of money, controlled by Whitehall. Overworked councils that are trying to provide services to the communities that the Government left behind have to bid against one another for scraps. Even when they have a demonstrable need, they may still fail, as Billingham in my constituency did, and all the while, leafy suburbs nearby were somehow successful in their bids. Perhaps the Queen's Speech should have had a Bill compelling the Government to be fair to all our communities.

The Secretary of State said that the Government would employ levelling-up directors to help councils to write their bids—so the Government will use taxpayer money to employ people to help places that the Government have disproportionately cut funding from to bid for pots of money that the Government control. Why do they insist on making areas that have been left behind by their failed policies jump through ridiculous hoops just to access basic pots of funding?

However, the scandal of growing poverty is what is really on my mind. I agree completely with the director of the North East Child Poverty Commission, Amanda Bailey, who said yesterday:

“We all want a North East in which every child can thrive and fulfil their potential—including through education—but they cannot do that whilst already high levels of hardship continue to grow.”

Through their failure to take decisive action, the Government are removing opportunities from children and young people in my constituency. As the Child Poverty Action Group said:

“This is a legislative agenda that risks leaving increased levels of child poverty—currently at almost 4 million and expected to rise further—as its only real legacy.”

The failure to deliver levelling up can also be seen in our struggling town centres. I will be interested to see the detail of the Government's non-domestic rating Bill, but from the little information available, I am concerned that it will not provide the overhaul that is needed. I urge the Government instead to look at Labour's ambitious plans to scrap and replace the outdated business rates system that disincentivises investment and holds back growth. Labour would also immediately cut tax for small business by raising the threshold for small business rate relief, supporting cash flow and investment this year.

It is time that we made the Amazons of this world pay their fair share, too. Huge online companies have thrived throughout the pandemic, and it is important that their tax burden appropriately reflects that. It is not fair that high street businesses are taxed more heavily than online giants. It is high time the Government levelled the playing field and brought business taxation into the 21st century.

Central to the rise in the cost of living is the increase in energy prices. It affects domestic consumers all over the country, but it is also felt tremendously by industries, particularly energy-intensive industries such as those in my constituency. There is nothing in the Queen's Speech to support them, despite many months of dire warnings to the Government that some will simply no longer be able to produce their materials competitively in the UK. The job market in constituencies such as mine relies on the sector. Once again, it is my constituents who will be the hardest hit if the Government do not get a grip on the issue. Production lines across the country are dependent on the industries continuing to function, as was dramatically shown in the carbon dioxide crisis last year. If the Government were serious about keeping down prices for consumer goods for our constituents who are struggling with rising prices, they would have provided comprehensive support for those industries.

Another area in which the Queen's Speech is completely lacking is health. The pandemic brutally exposed the cracks in our healthcare system, but the Government have done nothing to fix them. Instead, they have allowed them to yawn even wider, with gaping holes in provision. A record 6 million people are waiting for NHS treatment; they are waiting longer than ever before, often in serious pain and discomfort, limiting their ability to carry out their lives as normal.

I have said this in every Queen's Speech and Budget debate since I was elected 12 years ago, and I call for it again: my constituents need a new hospital. To be clear, they need a proper, whole new hospital that will help my community to address the health inequalities that blight it—not a refurbishment or a single new wing added to an existing hospital, which is what the Government are currently counting among their hospital builds. They just try to fudge the numbers all the time.

This Queen's Speech shows that Tory Ministers simply do not understand the enormity of the cost of living crisis that people on Teesside and across the country face. Instead of introducing measures to deal with rocketing food and energy costs, the Government are choosing to forge ahead with a tranche of half-baked and recycled ideas from previous Queen's Speeches that they have failed to implement and, worse still, with unnecessary ideological Bills that will do nothing to help the people of this country.

Why are the Government ploughing ahead with a media Bill that will see Channel 4—a unique institution that is owned by the British public but costs them nothing—sold to a foreign bidder? All that demonstrates is that the Government are not serious about supporting British-made programming and our home-grown creative industries across the UK.

Another broken promise is action on conversion therapy. The Government promised a comprehensive ban, so why will their ban not cover trans people or consenting adults? It is now time to end that cruel practice for all, with no exceptions.

The transport Bill is yet more evidence of a Government who are out of touch with the country. Under the Tories, rail passengers are paying more but getting less in return. Fares have risen twice as fast as wages, but services have been slashed and our constituents are being priced out of rail travel. Constituencies such as mine do not even have proper infrastructure to support

[Alex Cunningham]

improved rail services for constituents, so how do they stand to benefit from the Bill? There is nothing to improve our dire bus services either.

At the same time, the Tory Mayor has poured tens of millions of pounds into Teesside International airport, which continues to lose money. Those losses may increase after Loganair ends flights to Heathrow and Southampton, as was announced yesterday. The Mayor has blamed Heathrow charges, but I met Heathrow airport this morning and I suspect that the decision has more to do with Loganair's arrangements with the Mayor and the extremely low usage rates. I am determined to get to the bottom of it. Perhaps I might suggest to the Government a Bill to ensure full transparency where public money is being used. I think that that would be a very good idea.

We needed a Queen's Speech that would tackle the cost of living crisis, with an emergency budget, including a windfall tax, to get money off people's energy bills. Instead, we got the last scrapings of the barrel from a Government who have run out of ideas and are unable to tackle the challenges that our country is facing. They should make way for a party that will do so.

4.10 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a free, fair and open society in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one is enslaved by poverty, ignorance and conformity.

Let us take poverty first. If there was one message that the people of this country sent the Government in the recent council elections, it was that they were struggling and needed help at this time of a cost of living crisis. When we compare that message with the contents of Her Majesty's Gracious Speech, we see a Government who are not listening to what the people are asking them to do.

This is a Government who are more interested in stoking culture wars and opening past sores than in looking forward to a future on which we can all agree. We need only look at the way in which they are attacking our human rights. Promoting human rights is at the heart of what Liberal Democrats believe: it is in the DNA of our mission. What we have seen in the Queen's Speech, however, is a replacement of the Human Rights Act with a so-called Bill of Rights that will weaken, limit and undermine our current human rights protections. I do not think that that is what people throughout the country have asked for, and it is certainly not their priority at the moment.

Let us now put aside what is in the speech, which is overwhelming, and look at what has been missed out completely. There is no law to make misogyny a hate crime, there is no reform of the criminal justice system that has failed women and girls in particular for far too long, and there is nothing for the 4.1 million victims of fraud.

I have had personal experience of fraud recently. My official Twitter account was hacked, and I found myself looking at my online self trying to flog PlayStation 5s to my unwitting Twitter followers. Luckily none of them took it on and no one was inconvenienced, but it took

an age for me to regain control of my account. When we reported the incident to Action Fraud, I eventually received a phone call from—I must say—a lovely gentleman, who told me that of his team of four who, with him, comprised the entire support network, three were off with covid and the other was on holiday. I am pretty sure that I received the call because I was an MP and we had reported it because we were worried about security concerns.

I think that this omission says a great deal about the emphasis that the Government put on online crime, which is worth £27 billion a year. The Liberal Democrats do not believe that the provision in the Online Safety Bill is sufficient, which is why we are calling for the creation of an online crime agency to tackle illegal online content and activity effectively; but the Government, I am afraid, are not listening.

It is not just new legislation that is missing. I hope that some loose ends from the last Session will be tied up in this one, and I am thinking in particular of the Vagrancy Act. There was much celebration in all parts of the House when we finally consigned that Act to history, at least in theory, because in reality it has not yet been scrapped. The Government's public consultation closed last week. I sincerely hope that the Act will not be in force this Christmas, and that we will no longer be a country which criminalises people simply for being homeless. I look forward to truly celebrating when that happens.

My campaign began when the issue was brought to my attention by Oxford students. When they were turfed out of clubs at a late hour they would have conversations with homeless people on the streets of Oxford, which was how they discovered that the Vagrancy Act was one of the measures used by the police to move them on.

Those students have now graduated, but another campaign is being run by new students on an issue that is really troublesome. I want to raise it in my speech today, and I sincerely hope it will find its way into one of the 38 Bills. It is a campaign to stop the use of gagging clauses for university students. This applies in particular to young women, because it is mainly young women who are the victims of this, and they are being encouraged to not speak out about their experiences of sexual assault in university. The prevalence of sexual violence among young women and girls is well known, and there are doughty campaigners on this on all sides of the House.

The group It Happens Here supports survivors of sexual violence at the University of Oxford, and it urged one survivor—I will call her Lucy—to come to me with her story. She has given me permission to tell her story today, to show just how widespread this issue is. She was assaulted in her college dorm room by her ex-partner, who lives in the same college. With support from the Oxford sexual abuse and rape crisis centre, she reported the assault to the police during the Easter holidays. On returning to the university, she was terrified that her assaulter would find out that she had reported him to the police and therefore try to hurt her again. On the advice of the crisis centre, she spoke to the principal of her college about putting in place measures to protect her.

Months went by. Eventually, the college set up what is known as a no-contact agreement. This banned both students from entering each other's accommodations

and set out separate times to enter the dining hall. That sounds perfectly sensible, except that the agreement was conditional—and by the way, breach of the condition would result in expulsion—on neither party making any information about the assault, the police case or the college publicly available in any way. That is shameful. These are Lucy's own words:

"I signed it, feeling terrified that if I didn't agree to it he would be able to enter my accommodation without any consequence. But I was incredibly upset about the effective gag clause. I was terrified of telling absolutely anyone anything, because what if college interpreted that as 'publicly available'? I felt I couldn't talk to anyone, my friends or my mental health support or my GP, because of it and felt very alone."

This is not an isolated case. It Happens Here, the group supporting victims such as Lucy, has received testimony from survivors across several different colleges who are under similar gagging orders. I am aware of young women who are my constituents who are scared to talk to me directly about this because they are fearful that it would invoke the gagging clause and that they would be expelled. They fear that they have to choose between their voice and their future. The irony of this is that in cases of sexual violence, that discrepancy of power is at the core. It is not just about sex; it is about power. These young women have gone from a situation where they were robbed of their power into another situation where that power is again taken away, this time by the college.

I want to congratulate those survivors on having the courage to come forward to It Happens Here and to congratulate Lucy on coming to me, and I would urge others to do the same. I congratulate the Oxford student union, and especially Ffion Samuels, who have been brilliant at bringing these cases forward. I am pleased to report that Lady Margaret Hall, the college that Lucy attended, has now taken the important first step of signing a pledge committing never to use these types of non-disclosure agreements in cases of sexual misconduct, harassment or bullying. For this, it should be applauded, but it is shameful that it is the only Oxbridge college to have signed such a pledge. Some other universities have done so, but these agreements are rife in many other universities across the country.

I am grateful to the Universities Minister, who has called on all colleges to sign that pledge, and also to the Home Secretary who earlier today condemned such use of gagging clauses and agreed to meet me so that I could relay more stories of these victims. But for the survivors of sexual violence, delivering justice surely begins with allowing them to tell their story. We should be helping those victims to reclaim their power. These gagging clauses in the cases of sexual misconduct do nothing to help that. In fact, they do the exact opposite. They are immoral, they have no place in modern society, and I simply urge the Minister: please can we find a way to address this in this Parliament?

4.19 pm

**Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab):** We meet during a cost of living emergency, which is why I am so taken aback that too many Tory MPs in this debate—though there are far too few here now—instead of calling for the action and support that millions of people across our country need, have resorted to Alf Garnett cosplay, ranting about so-called benefit cheats, ranting about asylum seekers and fixating on a single protester outside Parliament and how he annoys them.

Millions of people are having to choose between heating and eating. Pensioners are riding buses to keep warm. Parents are going a whole day without eating to keep the kids fed. It is a cost of living emergency and, if we recognise it as an emergency, the Queen's Speech should have been used to implement emergency measures to help people now, yet the Tories offered nothing in the Queen's Speech. The Government are sitting on their hands and refusing to act. They are standing idly by while others suffer. Why? Because, actually, it has not been a bad crisis for everyone.

I understand that not all Tory MPs realise this, but the Tory party exists to ensure that wealth is sucked from the many into the hands of a few. Like Robin Hood in reverse, they rob from the poor and give to the rich. British billionaires increased their wealth hugely, by £290 million a day, in the first year of the pandemic. We have seen billions of pounds handed out in crony Government covid contracts. We have seen multibillion pounds of tax cuts for bankers, even as banks are recording record profits. Some are doing very well at the moment.

Given all that wealth, and given that we are the fifth biggest economy on Earth, it is clearer than ever before that poverty is always a political choice, including during this cost of living emergency. The Conservatives are choosing to push people into poverty through this cost of living crisis so that more and more of the wealth in our society goes to the wealthy.

Take energy, for example. Bills are rocketing. *[Interruption.]* The Tories scoff, but millions of people in this country will not take kindly to having it explained to them by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) that, actually, food banks exist because people do not have the cooking skills to feed themselves and because people do not know how to budget. That is completely out of touch, despite the Alf Garnett theatrics, and it is completely contemptuous of the reality faced by millions of people in our society.

The End Fuel Poverty Coalition is warning that the energy crisis could leave more than 8 million households, in one of the richest countries on Earth, unable to heat their home. At the same time, gas and oil giants are making £900 profit every second. Yesterday's Queen's Speech should have been the moment to make our energy system work for people, not for profit, by including a windfall tax to raise billions to lower the bills of millions. Not only that, it should have introduced the price caps we have seen in France, which have allowed bills to rise by only 4% and not by the 54% we have seen here, and we should have seen action to bring the energy system back into public ownership so that it works for people and not for profit. But the Prime Minister and his Government are willing to accept millions of people being forced into fuel poverty because that, to them, is more acceptable than the alternative of reducing the profits of the oil and gas giants. We often hear discussions about wage restraint; during a cost of living emergency we should be having discussions about profit restraint as well sometimes. But the Government are on the side of the oil and gas giants, not on the side of the vast majority of people in our society.

We need an emergency plan to tackle this social emergency—instead of doing nothing, the Government should be doing everything they can to immediately get money into the pockets of the millions of people hit

[Richard Burgon]

hard by the cost of living crisis. That is why I have tabled an amendment to this Queen's Speech calling on the Government to deliver a wealth tax Bill, which would introduce the best ways of raising taxes on the very wealthiest in our society. The tens of billions of pounds that would raise could be used to create a huge emergency fund to support people through the cost of living emergency. That is the job of the Government: people need security in their standard of living and to be able to pay their bills and have a roof over their head. The Government need to ensure that people get enough to eat, and have enough to heat their homes and to be treated with the respect that they deserve.

How obscene that we are having this discussion in one of the richest countries on earth and that the Government have deliberately squandered the chance to take the action needed to support people who are facing a cost of living emergency that they have never experienced before. It is at times like these that people look to the Government to do the right thing and support them through the toughest times. This Government, true to their political ideology, have chosen not to do that and instead to stand by and leave people to it, which is unforgivable. A wealth tax should be just the start of taking action to support people—the many in our society.

4.27 pm

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) and his passionate calls for action. I have become accustomed to feeling disappointment, dismay, despair and, at times, disgust in response to Government pronouncements, but this Queen's Speech is a new low. The people of my constituency deserve better than this low-growth, high-tax and, increasingly, high-inflation Government. Under Labour we had growth on average of 2% each year, but under the Tories it is averaging 1.5% and is forecast to go negative. The cost of living crisis brought about by this Government has my constituents flocking to food banks. The choice between eating and heating is real in my constituency. Child poverty rates in the north-east rose by more than a third, to 37%, between 2015 and 2019. Some 61% of children in Elswick in my constituency are growing up in poverty—this is in 2022!

What is the Government's response? This Queen's speech is remarkable for what is not in it, not what is: there is no emergency budget, with a windfall tax to get money off people's bills, as Labour has called for; and it contains no employment Bill, although the Government promised one. We needed a real plan for growth to get our economy firing on all cylinders, with a climate investment pledge, and a commitment to buy, make and sell more in Britain. Instead, the Government hike national insurance; cut universal credit; have real-terms pay cuts for public sector workers; freeze the rate of local housing allowance; and freeze the cap on childcare costs that UC claimants are entitled to. Each of those decisions make it even harder for my constituents to deal with rising costs.

The problem is that this Government do not believe that government can make a positive difference to people's lives. That leaves my constituents with stagnating wages;

the north-east regional economy without the investment it needs; hard-working Geordies facing massive technological and economic change without the skills they need; and the Tyne bridge peeling and our buses infrequent and overpriced. It does not have to be this way, because government can be a force for good. Governments can look ahead and plan—although not this Government, obviously.

I want to show how it can be different by looking at one Bill that was actually mentioned in the Queen's Speech and that really highlights the point, and by looking at where the Government are creating growth: in online crime. Online, the Conservatives are the party of no law and total disorder. The Home Secretary did not even bother to defend her Government's record when I challenged her earlier. I am an engineer and a passionate advocate for technology and innovation. It has truly distressed me to see technology go from being boring but useful to exciting but exploitative. Our constituents fear that tech is managing them, tracking, monitoring and analysing their every move, and then serving them up to be trolled, exploited, scammed, groomed or just bombarded with advertising and misinformation.

Online harms are not some future threat but an established current reality about which successive Conservative and Liberal Democrat Governments have done absolutely nothing, because they have believed in and, indeed, promoted the silicon valley libertarian lie that Governments could do nothing about the internet. They have thereby allowed monopolistic platforms to acquire more money and power than many Governments have. That power is used to deny workers' rights in silicon valley and to delay and minimise regulation here.

Successive Conservative and Liberal Democrat Governments chose to leave it to the market, blinded by their belief that the state was too slow or too stupid to regulate to keep people safe and secure online. They did that while actively cutting the parts of the state—such as the police and trading standards—the job of which it is to protect people. We now see the same dogmatic approach in the Government's attitude to the cost of living. They refuse to take action, such as by introducing a windfall tax, and instead cut programmes, such as the green homes scheme—axed just six months after it was announced—that could help.

Nevertheless, it is possible for Governments to take action. The Labour Government at the time saw the fast-evolving communications landscape of the late '90s, consulted widely and put in place forward-looking regulation in the form of the Communications Act 2003, which set out a regulatory landscape fit for the next decade. Come 2013, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government chose to ignore the many calls, from me and many others, to do something similar. It is no surprise that the former Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister is now Facebook's president of global affairs, justifying the online harms that deliver billions of pounds of revenue to that company.

The Online Safety Bill in the Queen's Speech will not be in place before 2023, so Conservatives have left my constituents unprotected and insecure online for more than a decade. The much-delayed Bill still fails in so many ways. It fails to strengthen child protection across the entire internet; to properly address the harmful impact that social media can have on young people's

mental health; and to ensure a voice to victims of abuse and harm online. The Bill needs to tackle disinformation online, and to close the loophole that means people are not properly protected from online fraud by ensuring that all platforms take a proactive approach to preventing scams.

The data reform Bill, also in the Queen's Speech, seems to be more about taking away protections than about giving new digital rights, and the digital markets Bill has no proper enforcer. This Government are constructing a piecemeal, ad hoc and, at times, kneejerk online legislative framework when what we need is a comprehensive, cross-departmental, evidence-based, forward-looking review of digital rights and responsibilities so that we can have a regulatory framework that is fit for the future. This is the security and the respect that the British public deserve in the digital age. It is also mind-numbingly depressing that the Government are repeating their mistakes of a decade ago, ignoring emerging harms, algorithms, artificial intelligence, the internet of things, bossware and data dominance.

There is nothing in the Bill that addresses the decentralisation inherent in web 3.0 reflected in the use of blockchain as part of the future architecture of the web. Although distributed ledger technology has many strengths, there is also a libertarian dogmatic view that the blockchain can replace regulation in Government. That is a lie, and the Government need to show that they understand that—but, clearly, they do not.

We also need more emphasis on people's rights, on access to algorithms and their regulation. The metaverse poses significant risk to children, with virtual reality chatrooms allowing children to mix freely with adults. Labour has long campaigned for stronger online protections for children and the public in order to keep them safe, to protect their prosperity from scams and online fraud, to secure our democracy, and to ensure that everyone is treated with decency and respect. Governments can act. This one refuses to do so. To be competitive in the global age, we need to empower everyone to be confident digital citizens. That is an economic imperative. An investment now will bear fruit for decades to come.

The Government have failed to rise to the challenge of the digital age, just as they failed to rise to the cost of living crisis, and failed to rise to the challenges of covid, of climate change, and of child poverty. They look at our northern cities and see problems to hide from, not opportunities for investment. Whether we are talking about short-term or long-term planning, this Government are failing. Britain deserves better and I look forward to a Labour Government who are on the people's side.

4.37 pm

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): What we have here is a set of divisive, straw man Bills—all fluff and no substance. Where these Bills do have substance, they are nasty and miserable, or they are in complete reverse from what was suggested in the previous Session. Planning is one such example. One moment, we were to have a developers' charter, but a rebellion on the Tory Back Benches meant that that was suddenly reversed, so now we have a nimbys charter. Suddenly, our neighbours will be able to vote on whether we can have that loft extension. Do not upset the Joneses otherwise there will be no extra room for your

child. What kind of world are we living in? It is absolute tosh. Then we have a Bill that will make sure that MPs can sit in their offices in silence—with no noisy protesters outside. Really! Is that the extent of the Government's ambition?

The borders Bill summed up the failure of the Home Office, which is unable to properly process refugees' applications, leaving them to wait years for proper and decent outcomes, and unable to create safe and legal routes for refugees, of which there are none at the moment for the vast majority of people in the world—none, in fact, for anyone outside Afghanistan and Ukraine. The only legal route to claim asylum is to make an illegal crossing. Is that not stupid? I would have thought that the Government would fix that tautology. No, instead they offshore the problem—they let Rwanda fix it because they cannot get their own house in order. Indeed, it is not just those applying for asylum who are suffering from Home Office mismanagement; ordinary people cannot even get their passports from the Home Office, such is the incompetence in that Department.

On conversion therapy, we have a Bill that is completely useless. Yes, it will protect under-18s, but the majority of those who attend conversion therapies are over 18 and they will of course sign a waiver because they will be told that if they want to stay in their church or their community, and with their friends and families, they will have to go through conversion therapy.

There is a good argument for including trans people in a ban on conversion therapy. I am not saying that trans people should not have psychotherapy and be able to discuss their options as they go forward, or that different options for going forward should not be presented to them and that things should not be slowed down rather than speeded up, but in conversion therapy, the therapist is trying to force people to go in one direction and that is wholly unethical in whatever form it takes. It is wrong for trans people, for gay people, or for any form of therapy where the therapist is forcing the person into a certain direction. The Government's failure to ban trans conversion therapy, and to ban conversion therapy entirely for over-18s, is a missed opportunity.

My partner twice suffered going through conversion therapies in his long process of coming out—he comes from an evangelical Christian background—and it has caused huge amounts of pain and agony. I do not want other people to go through that, and the loophole the Government have given is not worth the paper the rest of the Bill will be written on. I am deeply saddened by that and hope the Government will come forward with something to address it.

**Kit Malthouse:** I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's view on this. Is he proposing there should be an absolute ban on conversion therapy, even if an adult consents? I understand the problem he raises about societal and group influence, but I am genuinely interested in how he would overcome the issue of freedom of association, or indeed action, for an adult.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I do not think that any psychotherapy processes should ever have a prescribed outcome. Of course, people can have friends persuading them one way or another, but that is not a therapeutic programme. That is the difference.

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

This is a lock-‘em-up Queen’s Speech: lock up the refugees if they manage to get over here because there are no other legal routes for people to come; lock up protestors; and lock up people who may be drug addicts and need treatment and support rather than a criminalising approach. Meanwhile, it allows corporations to continue to get off the hook with tax dodging, and allows the huge covid scams that existed under this Government to go unpunished. There is nothing on clamping down on those corporations that led to the Grenfell tragedy—no forcing them to pay the costs of converting all the properties up and down the country.

We could have seen a cap on fuel bills. We could have seen real progress on social care, integrating it into the NHS. We could have seen the Union saved through confederacy, with the independent sovereign states and regions of this country coming together, instead of continuing the Conservative party’s blind approach of trying to pretend the Union is not in peril and forcing it further apart.

All the Queen’s Speech does on justice is pretend there is no problem. It pretends there is no backlog in the courts. It pretends that all people want is some British Bill of Rights. It pretends that there is not a crisis in the family courts. It pretends that there is not a crisis in the magistrates system—where the Government have cut local magistrates courts up and down the country in the past 10 years, where victims and people seeking justice cannot access a local court and often have to get a bus that takes half a day to get to the local court and a bus back. There is no access whatsoever and no suggestion of fixing it. Even where the Government do suggest some positive things, it is too little.

One area where I welcome some progress is on housing and the renter’s rights Bill that the Government are suggesting will come forward in this Parliament. I welcomed that in the 2019 Queen’s Speech, I welcomed it in the 2021 Queen’s Speech and of course I welcome it in this Queen’s Speech—but this is the third attempt to announce a strengthening of tenants’ rights. Ministers are planning to produce a Green Paper, to consult on it, to produce a White Paper and to get through all the stages in this place while assuming there will not be a new Session in Parliament or a general election, which would mean that all that good work was completely wasted.

I implore the Government to get on with the process, because every minute delayed is another minute of private renters being turfed out of their homes—and I literally mean every few minutes. Research by Shelter shows that every seven minutes a section 21 eviction notice has been served to households in England since the Government first committed to ending no-fault evictions. That equals 230,000 private renters who have been evicted from their households for no fault of their own.

Every one of those renters has their own story. Just last week I heard from one, a private tenant for 13 years in her current home, who has five children between 18 and seven years old. Their landlady has informed them they that they have to leave with a section 21 notice. The council will not help them until they get a county court judgment, and that is another scandal: once they have the county court judgment against them, they have a black mark against their name and they cannot rent from the private rented sector.

In this Kafkaesque world, that parent is petrified about even being about to put a roof over her children’s heads. She has the money to pay the rent, but will any landlord, or the council, help her? She says she is terrified. She has never been in rent arrears. She has two children with autism, one of whom has hypermobility problems and both of whom attend special educational needs provision in the city. She is worried she will have to move out of the city with the rest of her family. There is no legal redress or compensation for the fact that that family have been kicked out through no fault of their own after 13 years of calling that place a home.

I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group for renters and rental reform—I should mention that we are meeting next week, for those others who want to join—and our group has heard time and again that the lives of renters are being harmed.

These moves are positive, and the Government have agreed to set up a private rented property portal. I hope the lessons have been learned from the rogue landlord register, on which the Government predicted there would be 10,000 entries but on which, after two years of operation, there are just 21 names. It is completely useless. If the Government are to make the next register work, all landlords must be on it. Every single landlord in this country, with no exceptions—everyone in this Chamber who is a landlord, everyone out there who is a landlord—needs to be on that register and there needs to be a scorecard for them. If there is not, it will not work for people.

Finally, and most pleasingly in the housing section, there is to be a new housing ombudsperson. That is music to my ears, but what is the detail going to provide? Take the deposit scheme, where there is already a system of redress: it does not allow for precedent to be set from one judgment to the next in deposit disputes. If someone wins an argument that the level of mould was the landlord’s fault and not the tenant’s, the person in the house two doors down, with the same landlord who holds the deposit back and refuses to give it to them, has to go through all the arguments again, and with a different ombudsperson they might have a different outcome. We cannot have justice like that.

An ombudsperson in housing must have precedent for all the other cases they then see, unless the precedent is overturned through legal argument; and they must have open justice, where people can see the results of previous outcomes. They must look at rent, because we know that if we abolish section 21, all landlords will do is whack up the rent and kick tenants out. The Government’s saying they will make it easier for landlords to kick people out for rent arrears without going through the courts is a worry in itself. The system must not penalise tenants if they seek to use it, as currently happens in the county court system, where it can take many months, sometimes almost a year, to even get a hearing. There is a real problem with the backlog in our courts. The Government have called the Bill on housing and renters radical, and a radical approach is needed, so I hope we will see it.

4.49 pm

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Mr Deputy Speaker for being so understanding regarding my need to be

absent from the Chamber for a period of time and then allowing me to come back to speak. That is very gracious of you.

It is always an honour to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), who has a flair for theatrics. He is a gentleman I certainly enjoy conversing with. I am sure that his audition just now for the Christmas panto in Brighton will get some phones ringing for him.

The people of Stoke-on-Trent, Kidsgrove and Talke were delighted with this Queen's Speech, because it talks about the very places that they are proud to call home, and about the very issues that they raised with me on the doorsteps when I was out knocking doors in the recent local elections. Today's theme of safer streets is clearly one of those. They were delighted that the Government are pushing forward with the measures in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which will see child killers receiving a whole-life sentence, killer drivers being given longer sentences, and an end to the automatic early release of violent and sexual offenders.

We will also see the adoption of the Desecration of War Memorials Bill, which I brought to this House after the shameful acts of vandalism upon our Union flag at the Cenotaph in London over a year ago now. When I looked into that, I noticed that it was happening not just in London but across the country, and sadly even in Tunstall, where a war memorial to our glorious dead was graffitied. Thanks to two fantastic young girls who went along to clean it, that really brought to people's attention the importance of making sure that war memorials—and war graves, which the Government rightly added—have special protection. While the monetary value of war graves, for example, would require 10 or more to be damaged for any offence to go to a magistrates court, we now have an offence that reflects the emotional damage done to a community. These war memorials and war graves are in every village, town and city of our United Kingdom, and our glorious dead should always have the respect that they rightly deserve. It was just a shame that when I brought the Bill to the House Opposition Members ridiculed it as somehow being protection for statues rather than what it was clearly about—protecting war graves and memorials to our glorious dead. I hope that their jumping on the Twitter bandwagon, as the Opposition frequently like to do, will be a lesson learned and they will now come out and say that it was absolutely right to make sure that those memorials have full protection.

I am delighted to hear that we will have the draft victims Bill, because giving rights to victims is so important. It is sometimes easy, in the criminal justice system, for us to focus on the offenders and forget the victims. It is vital that we ensure that victims not only have their day in court but receive extra support and welfare after any sentence is given so that they can rightly feel recompensed for the crime committed against them.

The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 is exactly what the people of Stoke-on-Trent, Kidsgrove and Talke voted for when, back in 2016, 73% of them voted to leave the European Union because they wanted us to take back control of our borders. They wanted to send a very clear message that while they have absolutely no issue with people coming to this country legally—people, for example, who they can see are coming from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine fleeing persecution—they do have

an issue with people choosing to come across as illegal economic migrants from safe mainland European countries such as France, putting tens of thousands of pounds into the hands of people-smuggling gangs and fuelling an industry that is causing misery and turning the English channel into a watery grave. Let us not forget that 70% of those making that journey are men. My constituents see that queue-jumping and it does not sit right with them. That is not because they are not compassionate: Stoke-on-Trent is the fifth-largest contributor to the asylum dispersal scheme. They are happy to do all they can to support those who are most vulnerable and most in need, but they want fairness. If someone is coming from Ukraine, Syria, Hong Kong or Afghanistan, that is fair. People choosing to make that journey unnecessarily is simply not right. It is jumping the queue, and the British public were delighted to hear, when I was out in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, that we are taking action. They are just waiting to see that first flight take off and that policy come to fruition.

The Public Order Bill is another fantastic piece of legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) was absolutely correct to say that it is simply not right that the crusty woke warriors who are busy gluing themselves to pavements or roads, or standing on top of trains, meaning that they cannot leave—people who are preventing others from going out to earn their money—are allowed to take that action without feeling the full force of the law. There are plenty of ways for someone to demonstrate their feelings about wanting to solve the climate change crisis without having to go to those extremities where they damage people's lives, particularly when we are suffering with rising inflation and a rising cost of living. They are asking people potentially to lose out on a day's pay, and that is simply not right. Those people need to be held to account, especially when—the Policing Minister has said this from the Dispatch Box—they are taking extremely dangerous action on motorways, risking the lives of men, women and children, as well as their own. That is simply not appropriate, and it is therefore correct that we take action with this Bill.

Then we have the Government's fantastic ambition of 20,000 extra police officers, of which more than 13,500 have so far been recruited, with over 201 in Staffordshire alone. What is important—I know that the Policing Minister gets this—is that we do not just have these numbers, but that we see them transferred on to the streets. We are very lucky in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire to have got rid of the absolutely pathetic former chief constable, who had no ambition, no drive and no understanding of what the people wanted or expected. We have now brought in the fantastic new chief constable, Chris Noble, who has already drawn up a completely new plan for neighbourhood policing in our local area. It means Newcastle-under-Lyme will have a new policing hub based there, with dedicated officers for the Kidsgrove and Talke area. The plan will also look at how the Stoke-on-Trent North policing area, which I also cover, will work. That will be extremely well received. The plan has bobbies on the beat and bobbies engaging with local businesses, schools and communities, but also makes sure that those response times are met. Those are all the types of thing that people want to see.

[Jonathan Gullis]

Finally, there is the safer streets fund, which I fully support. In Stoke-on-Trent, we have had a whopping £2 million or more from four successful bids. My only gripe is that none of that money has gone to Stoke-on-Trent North. It has all gone to my friends in Stoke-on-Trent Central and Stoke-on-Trent South, and I am greedy. I want my own pot of money for places such as Cobridge, Tunstall and Smallthorne, which rightly want alley gates, more CCTV and new back doors and front doors. The blight of antisocial behaviour and fly-tipping is something that Members in all parts of this House will experience in their constituencies. We need to ensure that all the measures that can be taken are taken to prevent that as best as possible. I therefore look forward to lobbying the Minister, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire police, fire and crime commissioner Ben Adams to make sure that those bids go to the right place.

We also need to look at the consequences for those who are responsible for antisocial behaviour. It is easy to blame the Government, and it is easy for the public sometimes to moan at the police, but personal actions are someone's personal responsibility, and those individuals should be held accountable for their poor choices. In the case of someone under the age of 18 who is constantly having the police knock on their door, and whose parents or carers are taking no action to back the police, the school or a social worker when they say, "You need to have stricter controls on the young person you are in charge of", perhaps we should look at making sure that those high-vis chain gangs are not just for those who commit ASB. Perhaps the household should be made to go out and tidy up the community and clean up the streets. If they have to suffer the consequences of that delinquent's poor actions—that feral youth who is acting in such a poor way—perhaps the whole household will take much more seriously the need to back our police, our teachers, our social workers and our care system when they say, "You, as a parent or carer, have a responsibility to bring up your child or young person in care in a responsible way."

It is about holding people accountable. Boundaries are important. I know that, because I spent eight and a half years as a teacher before coming here. As a head of year, I was in charge of attendance and behaviour, as well as being—I am sure Opposition Members will be shocked—a trade union representative on the shop floor, proud to represent the NASUWT for all that time.

I will be quick about the other things in the Queen's Speech because I do not want to be cheeky with time. The Mental Health Act reform Bill is personal for me; I shared my story in *The Daily Telegraph* about my struggles with mental health. I am proud to be part of a campaign called No Time to Wait led by my friend and former Government adviser James Starkie, which calls on the Government to ensure that we have a mental health nurse in every GP surgery across the country to help to triage. We know that 40% of GP cases are specifically for mental health, so we need action on that. I am delighted to have support from Labour Members, such as the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), who is not in her place, and Liberal Democrats Members as well as the Royal College of Nursing, *The Daily Telegraph* and Mind, which is an important charity.

I was also delighted that the Chancellor hosted a reception for us yesterday at No. 11 Downing Street to share the campaign's aims and raise awareness of it. I hope that that is something that the Government will take up. I see the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), on the Treasury Bench and I am delighted that he has had the chance to hear that. I look forward to meeting him and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to have those further discussions. It is something that we simply must come to terms with and deal with quickly.

I am delighted that the Online Safety Bill is coming forward, because we need to tackle those vile online sites that coerce and advise people on how to take their own lives. In Stoke-on-Trent, a young man called Brett Stevens was sadly a victim of that type of crime. His mother Angela brought that to my attention and we have been engaging with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. It is vital that the legislation creates a new offence so that anyone who encourages or assists self-harm is held accountable by the law, as the Law Commission recommended. It is not right that those websites can do such things.

Then we have our places and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: this is what the Government were elected on and what Stoke-on-Trent has been long overdue and waiting for after 70 years of Labour neglecting it and forgetting where it is, because the assumption was that it would automatically vote Labour at every general election. It took Labour losing Stoke-on-Trent for its party members to find where it is, although that was a bit of a journey—they thought it was in Stoke Newington at first, but they finally made their way to Stoke-on-Trent on a couple of occasions. Every time they have come, the Conservative gains have increased in the local elections and by-elections, so I thank them very much for all the campaigning that the Opposition are helping us with.

With the planning reforms that are being undertaken, I want the Government to go further than just compelling landlords on the high street to fill their shops after a year. I want them to strengthen planning enforcement to make sure that if a landlord's window is broken or dirty, if there is poo muck, as there sadly is outside some of my shop fronts, or if the signs are hanging half off, the landlord is held responsible and tidies it up. It is not appropriate for a private landlord to allow the high street to become neglected and ruined. The state should give the power to local councils to hold those responsible to account.

I also want the Government to adopt my ten-minute rule Bill, which I introduced more than two years ago and reintroduced in the previous Session—I will be doing that again this time—about section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. It would increase the current fine of a maximum of £1,000 on a rogue or absent landlord, as we have at Price and Kensington, to make it unlimited to allow a judge to determine the seriousness of the fine. The Bill would also increase the daily fine after that from £100 to £500 so that rogue landlords can be held accountable and responsible for their actions.

On education, we have the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, which is brilliant because it is about time that we have a focus on technical education and apprenticeships. We need to make sure that apprenticeships work, which



is why we need to reform the apprenticeship levy. Members across the House will agree that it is not working in the interest of business and is not enticing businesses to take on apprentices. We need to ensure that that lot of money, which is sitting in a pot somewhere not doing anything, is doing what it should be doing and helping those young people or adults who are looking to reskill and retrain. I am delighted to have Jess from Talke Pits as an apprentice in my office, who is doing a fantastic job. We will soon advertise for our new apprentice from Stoke-on-Trent College, because I want to make sure that I am leading the way. If I am calling for businesses to do it, I need to set the example.

The £4 billion that is going into those skills through the lifetime skills guarantee is also superb. The higher education Bill with the lifelong loan entitlement will reap benefits for those people who need to reskill or retrain, or who want to have a change, which is exciting. The Schools Bill banishes the lazy culture of low expectations and poor aspiration, which is also important, especially the increase in literacy and numeracy to 90% in young primary school students.

There are two other points. It is good that we are going for full academisation by 2030—it is about time that we do this—but there are some rotten multi-academy trusts in our system, as I know from my time as a trade union rep. We want a Bill to make sure that the board of trustees of a multi-academy trust faces an Ofsted inspection to look at its governance structures, its accounts and how it is applying its policies across the board. I want these to work, and if they do not work Labour Members will say that these are just more unaccountable and less transparent local education authorities. I do not want the Labour party to be right, which is why I want to make sure we get this policy right. I therefore hope that the Government will adopt my ten-minute rule Bill. I will be reintroducing it in this Session and seeking the cross-party support for it that I got in a previous parliamentary Session, because it is about time that boards of trustees are held to the same standards as the teachers who work within their profession.

I also wrote not long ago about grammar schools. I know that some Conservative Members will say I am just dragging up an age-old Tory argument, and Labour Members will be going, “Oh, here we go—a bit of blue on blue!” However, I think grammar schools are fantastic. I believe they are fantastic because—as I saw with my own mother, who is the beneficiary of one, and my own brother, who is the beneficiary of one—those I have met in Stoke-on-Trent who were able to attend one say that it transformed their lives for the better. It is so important to remember that 60% of grammar schools are situated in 11 out of 150 local education authority areas, which is simply not right. A child in the north-east does not have access to a single one, and that is not appropriate. That is why I hope this Government will work with me to see how we can lift the ban on grammar schools and give parents such a choice, so that parents have the same choice for a kid in Stoke-on-Trent as for a one in Kent.

5.6 pm

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): After 12 years of a Conservative Government, they now promise that this will be the Queen’s Speech to fix regional inequality. Forgive me if I do not take the Government’s words at face value. We have heard all

this before, and just like before, this Government are all talk and no action. First it was the long-term economic plan—remember that? The Conservative party cynically used that phrase time and again to justify slashing services for those who needed them most. Then it was the northern powerhouse. Let us check how that is going—major infrastructure projects scrapped, living standards down and inequality up.

When I say “inequality”, I know that it is a word we can knock about a bit, but it means people, families and children living in abject poverty and having no way out of it. Let us be clear about that, and let us remind everyone again whose fault that is. This Government have been in power for 12 years, but from some of the rhetoric we have heard today, we would imagine this Government were elected only two years ago. When these hon. Members talk about resetting things and getting on with things, what they are actually doing is admitting that they have got it wrong for the last few years. If they had got it right, we would not be seeing them coming up with such policies now, so I do not think that is anything to talk about or celebrate.

To move on, the latest buzzword now is “levelling up”, but just like all those other times before, the Government are hoping that a catchy slogan will be enough to distract us from their chronic inaction. It is yet another piece of the empty rhetoric we have come to expect from the Conservatives, but their record speaks for itself. In my constituency of Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough, we have borne the full brunt of more than a decade of Tory cuts. The spending power of Sheffield City Council has been slashed by almost a third since 2010. Communities such as mine do not need catchphrases; they need investment.

Turning to a particular area very close to my heart, further education has a huge role to play if we are truly to level up. Sadly, we are seeing worrying trends in skills and in education. In a recent survey, a third of British businesses said that their workforces are lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills. Our further education institutions go above and beyond to upskill their students. Having worked in colleges for most of my life, I know that education is one of the most powerful tools in lifting people out of poverty, and I have seen that in action in my constituency. The Sheffield College and Longley Park Sixth Form do fantastic work to ensure that their students leave with the skills that they need to succeed, but that commitment is not matched by the support they need from Government. The Prime Minister speaks about the importance of getting people into high-paid jobs, but he refuses to take the action needed to get them there. More investment in further education and post-16 education and careers is needed now.

The Government’s further education and post-16 reforms risk leaving behind completely the students who need the most help. T-levels are an important addition to our education system, but they should not come at the expense of existing qualifications that have proved to be successful. BTECs are taken by almost a third of 16 to 18-year-old students and help to ensure that young people enter adulthood with a level 3 qualification, which is vital when entering the workforce. Rolling them back will undermine that work as well as cut student choice and degrade the variety of qualifications that employers can look for. Students who do not qualify for

[Gill Furniss]

T-levels could end up falling through the cracks and miss out completely on any levelling-up exercise, should it even exist.

**Tom Hunt** (Ipswich) (Con): I agree with the hon. Member that apprenticeships and technical education have not been promoted enough, but does she agree that that was not helped by the previous Labour Prime Minister but one having an obsession with a 50% university target and that many people who have gone to university would have been better served by doing an apprenticeship?

**Gill Furniss:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention, but I would say: your Government have been in power for 12 years and, if you did not like it, why did you not do something before?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. The hon. Lady knows that she must not address the hon. Gentleman directly.

**Gill Furniss:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Cutting BTECs flies directly in the face of levelling up. Instead of that, the Government should be championing them alongside T-levels. That is just one example of the Government's actions failing to meet their rhetoric. Ministers are already making excuses on levelling up. The Levelling Up Secretary has spent the last week trying to cover up his own failures and those of the Government. He is trying to lead us to believe that deepening inequality is purely a result of external events such as covid and the war in Ukraine, but we know the truth.

We know that responsibility for the entrenched inequalities in our society falls at the door of this Conservative Government and their policies. Pensioners are having to ride buses all day to keep warm and families are struggling to afford the basic essentials, but, instead of stepping in, the Government are stepping aside. They are too busy trying to cover their own shortfalls to provide the support that people are crying out for. We all know why they are doing that: one day, just like the long-term economic plan and the northern powerhouse, levelling up will be retired as a political slogan with nothing to show but deeper inequality and worsening living standards.

The Government have once again shown that they are all talk and no action. The Queen's Speech is yet another missed opportunity that fails to fix the deep-rooted inequalities caused by 12 years of this Conservative Government. They are out of ideas and out touch—and hopefully, following the Conservatives' dire local election results on Friday, they will soon be out of office. Britain deserves so much better than this.

5.14 pm

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): The first duty of any Government is to keep its citizens safe. We heard that earlier—it was the Home Secretary's opening remark when she started the debate—but the Government have failed in that duty over the last 12 years.

On the Conservatives' watch, we have seen police officers disappearing from our streets, a criminal justice system in chaos and people feeling much less safe in their own communities. The Government's record on

crime and justice is utterly woeful: total crime is up, charge rates are down, and victims appear to be being abandoned. The Queen's Speech was an opportunity for the Government to finally get tough on crime and the causes of crime, rebuild our broken criminal justice system and make our communities safer. Yet again, they have failed completely to grasp that opportunity. Once more, the Government are chasing the wrong priorities while ignoring the criminality that people face daily. There are vague promises in the Queen's Speech to make our streets safer, but there is little detail on how they will tackle the real concerns of the people in Coventry North East, such as local neighbourhood crime and persistent antisocial behaviour that has such a serious impact on both individuals and communities in my constituency.

Over recent years, we have seen significant issues with antisocial behaviour on our streets, from problems of noise, nuisance and neighbour disputes to vandalism and the illegal use of off-road motorbikes. More and more residents are now contacting me to tell me that these incidents are leaving them feeling intimidated, threatened and fearful for their safety. Sadly, the Government's record shows they simply do not seem to understand—or, worse still, care—how persistent antisocial behaviour like this can destroy communities and blight residents' quality of life. That probably explains why the Government have failed to put in place a co-ordinated national plan on antisocial behaviour for a decade, which has left communities in Coventry North East feeling abandoned.

My local force, West Midlands police, has been badly let down and hamstrung by a lack of resources, with both officer numbers and budgets cut to the bone by successive Tory Governments for more than a decade. The police in my constituency do a wonderful job and I am always grateful for the regular updates they bring me. However, what is really apparent is that they cannot do more with less money and fewer resources. Worst of all, we now have what seems like a postcode lottery on policing resources. For example, how is it Warwickshire police can have a dedicated off-road bike team when West Midlands police does not and cannot? That lack of resources means there is an absence of visible community policing on our streets, with fewer officers to reassure residents, deter criminality, investigate crimes and support victims. Indeed, all too often residents tell me they rarely see bobbies on the beat any more, while the officers I have spoken to tell me there are simply insufficient resources to investigate every crime.

**Jonathan Gullis:** The hon. Lady rightly talks about off-road bikes, which are an issue in my constituency. We have section 59 notices, which I do not think are working as a deterrent. Does she agree with that, and does she think that, cross-party, we can try to find a way to toughen the law in this area?

**Colleen Fletcher:** In my constituency, off-road motorbikes are being used in a very, very intimidating way. They are almost escorting cars around. They are not doing them any actual harm, but they are intimidating people, so much so that one person in my constituency had to stop at the side of the road to gather himself to be able to drive on. That has been said to me time and again through emails and through visits in the community. I visited the police. I had a meeting with our police and

crime commissioner. Only two weeks ago I had a summit meeting with the leader of the council and others, where I spoke about off-road motorbikes.

It would be useful if we could do something. The police and the police and crime commissioner tell me that there are not enough resources, and they have to put the resources where they need them. There are pots of money, such as the safer streets fund, but is that really the way to tackle those problems? This must be done far more broadly than it is now. Of all the antisocial behaviour incidents, I deal most with off-road motorbikes, and I know that this goes on across the whole west midlands. It does not happen only in my area, which is why we should look at what we are giving to police forces and say, "This is a problem up and down the country. We need to tackle it." I would work with anybody to try to tackle it.

In a tacit admission of the damage that they have inflicted on policing, the Government introduced the police uplift programme. Although any uplift in officer numbers is welcome, let us be clear that this will still not take West Midlands police back to pre-austerity levels of policing. We lost 2,221 officers in the west midlands during the austerity years, and although the force is due to get back more than 1,200 officers through the police uplift programme, that still leaves a shortfall in the west midlands of more than 1,000 officers compared with 2010 levels.

**Kit Malthouse** *rose*—

**Colleen Fletcher:** I have nearly finished and I have already given way.

When launching the uplift programme in 2019, the Prime Minister said:

"I have been clear from day one I will give the police the resources they need".

If his rhetoric is to match reality, and if he is to meet his pledge to level up, the Prime Minister must return the 1,000 police officers to the west midlands. Sadly, there was no commitment in the Queen's Speech to either resource the police properly or tackle the antisocial behaviour problems on our streets effectively. I fear that once more on crime and justice, the Government have failed West Midlands police and failed the people of Coventry North East.

5.22 pm

**Neale Hanvey** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): I want to address the Queen's Speech in regard to the position on justice. Justice is a light-and-shade issue; it is not all black and white. I am not surprised by the lacklustre Queen's Speech and Government programme. I have not been surprised by the policies of Conservative Governments since I was a teenager. I am disappointed that we are yet again facing the same challenges that were visited on Scotland when I was younger. However, the tone from Government Members today is that of a punitive Government who are focused on punishment, not justice. That was personified by the behaviour of the Home Secretary when she opened the debate, with her dismissive and graceless attitude towards her counterpart on the Opposition Front Bench, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). From my perspective, this needs to be addressed from a position of understanding the light and shade of justice.

Many of the drivers of criminality are social in nature and include such things as poverty, destitution and grinding hopelessness. I cast my mind back to my teenage years, when Thatcherism stalked the streets of Scotland and destroyed many of the communities there—proud mining communities, industrial communities—as cuts and closures were visited on them.

I was a Labour voter when I lived in London, but when I returned to Scotland I was gripped by the progress that had been made with devolution and by the team, record and vision, as it was known, of Alex Salmond's early SNP Government. The significant advances that they had made in improving the quality of life of the Scottish people seduced me and encouraged me to believe in Scottish independence. The other factor that drove me to that conclusion was the election of a Conservative Government in 2010, enabled by the Liberal Democrats, which motivated me sufficiently to move out of the health service and into frontline politics.

The UK Government's legislation does not fit the aspirations of Scots. Their immigration policies drive down inward migration, but in Scotland we need more people, not fewer. As for policing the streets, crime and justice is largely devolved in Scotland, but the drivers of criminality are the responsibility of this place, which has legislated to drive people into deprivation and destitution. The police's job is made all the harder in Scotland because we do not have the normal powers of an independent country.

Let me set out a couple of the key issues. We have a serious problem with drug-related deaths in Scotland. People do not wake up one day and say, "I'm going to become a drug addict"; addiction is the result of grinding poverty, hopelessness and lack of opportunity, which are controlled by this place. If we are to improve those people's quality of life, we must have the full economic powers of an independent country. We must also make progress on moving drug-related problems from the criminal justice system to public health.

**Kit Malthouse:** I recognise that the nationalist imperative is that all that is good in Scotland is down to the nationalists, while all that is bad is down to the UK Government. With respect to what the hon. Gentleman says about drug deaths, however, would it not be interesting to understand why the problem is so much more severe in Scotland than in England and Wales? I do not think that the UK Government have necessarily discriminated between them over the past 30 or 40 years. Certainly, for the past decade or more, all the tools required to get on top of the problem of drug deaths, which I acknowledge is very severe in Scotland, have been in the hands of the nationalist Government. Presumably the hon. Gentleman is putting as much pressure on them as he quite rightly puts on us to come together to solve the problem.

**Neale Hanvey:** Drug deaths are not an isolated issue that exists in a bubble. The opportunities to correct them require the full economic levers of an independent country. While the problem exists, the remedy is retained by this place. The issues cannot be isolated. I certainly do not say that all is rosy in Scotland and that an independent country would flourish spontaneously, but independence is a gateway to different choices, different policies and different politics. It is not a panacea; that is not the argument that I am making. I will cover some of the Minister's other points as I make progress.

[Neale Hanvey]

There is another issue that affects crime and justice in Scotland and is a very good illustration of why Scotland needs the full economic levers of an independent country. Harnessing Scotland's vast energy resources must benefit the Scottish people, not Her Majesty's Treasury as it does currently. How can it be that in an energy-rich country such as Scotland, our people are fuel-poor and hungry and our pensioners survive on the lowest pension in the developed world? There are uncomfortable truths for those on the Government Benches. It is absolutely clear, from the Queen's Speech and from the actions and words of Conservative Members, that this Government will prioritise the profits of energy companies over the wellbeing of the people whom they are supposed to serve. The chancellor's economic policies are making inflation worse, not better.

There are alternative choices. For instance, the Chancellor could reduce council tax by a quarter, at a cost of £10 billion a year. That would reduce the retail price index by 1%. He could halt skyrocketing energy bills with a 50% cut. That would cost another £10 billion, but it would take another 1% off the RPI. Every time the RPI goes up, so do the interest payments to global financiers on index-linked gilt debt. A 1% RPI increase puts £5 billion on to those interest payments, but equally, 1% off the RPI saves £5 billion. The Chancellor—if he had a conscience—and a Government with the political will could reduce energy costs and cut council tax immediately. Her Majesty's Treasury could finance the additional £10 billion with the windfall tax on the energy companies' profits. Saving £10 billion for the financial markets and £10 billion from a windfall tax could fix many of the problems that we face immediately. All it takes is political will and a determination to improve the lives of the people you are supposed to serve.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order.

**Neale Hanvey:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I mean “the people the Government are supposed to serve”.

What is clear, and what I do not think has been mentioned by anyone today—although it has been mentioned many times outside this place—is that poverty is a deliberate political choice. Scotland is replete with energy, far more than we could ever possibly need, but our people see no benefit from that. Contracts for difference, along with asymmetric and uncompetitive transmission costs, impede any inward investment in Scotland. We should be in the vanguard of the renewables sector manufacturing industry, but unfortunately there is precious little manufacturing happening in Scotland.

It is not just Westminster that is at fault. This brings me back to the point made by the Minister a moment ago. The Scottish Government shamefully sold off ScotWind licences for relative pennies—£700 million. They set a ceiling on the bids. Bids for a much smaller licence in the United States realised \$4.37 billion.

**Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP):** I am sure the hon. Gentleman would not want to inadvertently mislead the House, but the £700 million to which he refers is for options to develop. It completely ignores any future revenue streams, or indeed any royalties that might come. I am sure he would wish to correct the record.

**Neale Hanvey:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I think he has made his point clearly. I do not want to go back over what I have said; I think I am using up enough time.

There are real people in need. The monthly operating costs of my local food bank, Kirkcaldy Foodbank, have risen from £3,000 to £23,000. The notion that this is some kind of “squeeze” is a complete fantasy. This is a cost of living catastrophe: people are in absolute desperation. A “working poor” gentleman phoned LBC radio station to say that he could not afford to feed himself for days on end. He prioritised feeding his children, and he had been thinking about stealing clothes for them because he was so desperate. It was horrendous to listen to, and it cast my mind back to my university days and the “Heinz dilemma”. A man with a sick wife is forced to consider stealing the cure for her illness because the pharmacist will not cut the price or allow him to pay over time. That is where we are. People are in absolute desperation, and that is the misery that the greed of the markets drives. I knew, when David Cameron was elected Prime Minister, that things would be bad, but I did not anticipate that it would be quite the horror show that we are now witnessing. I do not regret or apologise for my sense of urgency over Scottish independence. The Prime Minister talks about compassion, but people need Governments' deeds to match their rhetoric. I hope and pray that Scotland's First Minister comes good on her promise for an independence referendum next year. Prevarication will not do; people are desperate and they need action. If we want to prevent crime, we need to lift people out of deprivation. That is the only true way to deliver justice.

5.35 pm

**Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** No debate of this nature would be complete if I did not refer to Space Hub Sutherland. It is not all bad on the Conservative Benches: we are profoundly grateful for the Government's assistance in bringing that project to the point it is at today. It has been a great pleasure to have Mr Roy Kirk of Highlands and Islands Enterprise sitting up in the Gallery for much of this debate. He has had to go home now but, me being me, I will make sure he gets a copy of *Hansard* so that he can see that I have name-checked him.

This is my only opportunity in the next few days to speak on the Queen's Speech, and I am going to make three general, fairly broad points. In the last few days, just about every candidate standing in the local government elections in Easter Ross in the south of my constituency used a picture of the oil rigs in the Cromarty Firth. They are a majestic sight that we all know very well indeed. If you travel further north in my constituency and look east, you will see the Beatrice offshore wind farm, which produces enough electricity to power a staggering 450,000 homes. We also have loads of onshore wind farms in my constituency, and of course there is a discussion to be had about the merits of offshore and onshore wind, as many rural Conservative Members will know.

This leads me to my first point, which echoes a point made by the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey). My constituents live cheek by jowl with the symbols of British energy production and yet they are faced with a crippling rise in the cost of heating

their homes. I hope that image brings home to the House the irony that, where I live, we produce so much energy but we have to pay through the nose for it. We should also remember that far too many of my constituents have no choice other than to use fuel oil to heat their homes. That is the nub of the problem, and I am horrified that the vulnerable and elderly have to make the invidious choice—perhaps this is a hackneyed phrase—between heating and eating. If the Government really do believe in levelling up—perhaps another hackneyed phrase—to help the most disadvantaged, and I hope they do, then solving this particular energy problem is crucial. I personally intend to pursue this in the most dogged fashion possible.

In terms of levelling up, the contribution made by the BBC and Channel 4 to bolstering local, independent production companies all over the UK cannot be overstated. Given Channel 4's plans to provide 100,000 opportunities for young people starting in the media industry, to invest £2 billion in nations and regions content over the next decade and to become a truly digital-first public service broadcaster, the Government's plans to sell it off to the private sector are, I am afraid, severely misjudged. But I take heart from the knowledge that many Conservative Members agree with that opinion. Let us think of what Channel 4 has produced: the Paralympics, "It's a Sin", and "Derry Girls", which was made in Northern Ireland. What benefit has that been to the economy of Ulster? There was also the Black to Front project. These are all shows and features that have a British hallmark and would not have been made if Channel 4 did not have the freedom to prioritise public interest and purpose over profit.

Many Members will have read in *The Times* today the quote from Tim Bevan, who co-chairs Working Title Films. He said:

"British films have always been quite difficult to get made"

and that plans to privatise Channel 4 and scrap the BBC licence fee were a "travesty". He also said:

"The British film industry and independent production have been supported by those two institutions...That's our culture. We don't want to be making American projects, we want to be making British films."

He is absolutely right. English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, and the work of Channel 4 and the BBC gives our country international soft power that can hardly be imagined—I have seen it for myself.

I will keep my contribution short and conclude on power. The Public Accounts Committee has drawn the House's attention to the fact that the Royal Air Force will have 30 fewer combat aircraft by 2025 because of the decision to retire Typhoon early. When we think that, over the last seven years, we have spent no less than £701 million on developing new radar systems for Typhoon that will not be ready until 2030, we can see there is something desperately wrong with how we are planning to defend our country in the future. These are killer facts.

Members on both sides of the House have rightly said that the plans to reduce the size of the British Army are ill-conceived. Combined with the Typhoon nonsense, we can see that the United Kingdom is surely in danger of sending entirely the wrong signal to our friends and allies, particularly when the dangers we face are all too clear. Now more than ever, we must not drop our guard.

I close with a reminder from the past. In the early 1980s, the Treasury imposed cuts on defence spending, one of which led to the decision to remove the Royal Navy Antarctic vessel HMS *Endurance* from the south Atlantic. Historians claim that that decision was part of Argentina's reasoning that the United Kingdom was not serious about defending the Falklands, and that it was therefore worth taking the risk of invasion. The rest is history, and only an exceptionally foolish state does not learn from the past.

5.42 pm

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I will focus on a few key areas. The Queen's Speech is arguably more notable for what it does not include than for what it does. The biggest issue facing our country and most, if not all, of our constituents is the cost of living crisis that is causing great hardship in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and beyond. What we needed more than anything yesterday was a Queen's Speech that included measures to tackle the cost of living crisis, with at the very least an emergency Budget and a windfall tax to get money off people's bills now.

The Prime Minister hinted yesterday that help will be announced in the coming days, only for the Treasury to announce in the following hours that that is not the case. That would be both shocking and unbelievable in normal times but, as we know, we are a long way from normal times.

A recent discussion with my local citizens advice bureau highlighted the growing hardship in my constituency. Overall client numbers have doubled, and queries on energy have increased by 250%. This is evident in the current fuel poverty crisis, which is now mainly about support to pay fuel bills. The number of debt queries has increased by 200%, and council tax debt is now the biggest issue, with a 200% increase on last year. This is incredibly worrying as these are household debts.

Probably most worrying is the massive increase—over 500%—in requests for food bank vouchers and other charitable support, yet there was nothing in the Gracious Speech to tackle this growing crisis. The Government are either not listening or, if they are listening, are failing to act. The lack of compassion and action is shameful.

It is also offensive that the energy giants are announcing their highest ever profits—Shell announced profits last week of more than £7 billion for the first quarter of the year—yet the Government refuse to consider a windfall tax when, as we have heard over and over again today, people are struggling to choose between heating and eating. That is truly shameful.

I am pleased to see legislation on access to cash, after years of delay. We eagerly await the details, given that the Government have allowed 6,000 local bank branches to close on their watch since 2015, leaving many geographically isolated communities without access to cash. In some areas, including Treharris in my constituency, post offices too have walked away and left communities without access to cash.

I am pleased to see that the ban on conversion therapy is in the Queen's Speech, because it is long overdue. However, it should be a complete ban, with no fudging and no vague approach that will leave loopholes, which will no doubt be exploited.

**Jamie Stone:** On access to cash, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should take proper, firm action to make the banks work together to produce some sort of common access—some sort of real face behind the counter?

**Gerald Jones:** I absolutely agree with that point, because we have seen too many examples, particularly in rural and isolated areas, where communities are left without any access to cash. The opportunity for banks and other financial institutions to work together is long overdue.

As we know, the Tory record on crime is shocking. We have heard again today that crime is up, charges are down, criminals are getting off and victims are being let down by the Conservatives not taking crime seriously. We have seen an 18% rise in total crime over the past two years. Quarterly recorded crimes are now at their highest point on record, at 1.6 million. As the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), told us earlier, the overall charge rate has fallen from 15.5% in 2015 to just 5.8% in 2021, meaning thousands more criminals getting off and more than 1 million theft cases being closed without a suspect being identified—and there is no sign of things improving.

Antisocial behaviour continues to blight our communities. I have spoken in previous debates about the difference under the last Labour Government, when all local wards—I was a county councillor at that time—had a police officer and one or sometimes two police community support officers. We do not have to hark back to “Dixon of Dock Green” to find a time when people knew their community bobbies, as we had that in the period of the last Labour Government up to 2010. At that time, the neighbourhood policing teams provided meaningful engagement and deterrence in communities before issues got out of hand. We now have the same-sized teams covering five or six wards, and the sheer lack of people on the ground makes it impossible for them to tackle issues effectively, despite their best efforts. Labour would strengthen legal protections for victims of antisocial behaviour to give victims of persistent, unresolved antisocial behaviour new rights, and we would give the police and local authorities stronger powers to shut down premises being used for drug dealing or consumption. Although we have seen more police officers recruited, we still have thousands fewer than we had before the Tories started cutting them in 2010. I am grateful that in Wales we have the support of the Welsh Labour Government on this. Although they do not have responsibility for policing, as it is not devolved, they have provided funding for 500 PCSOs—that has increased to 600 in this Senedd term.

Before I leave the topic of policing, I would like to put on record again the issue of the apprenticeship levy paid by Welsh police forces. In England, funding for the police education qualifications framework, which includes apprenticeships for uniformed police officers, is provided through the national apprenticeship levy. In short, English police forces are fully reimbursed by the Government for the cost of training police officers. In Wales, the Home Office has reimbursed only half that cost, leaving Welsh police forces with a shortfall of more than £2 million.

**Kit Malthouse:** I acknowledge the issue that the hon. Gentleman is raising. However, I am sure he would want to acknowledge that although the UK Government do collect the apprenticeship levy, as he rightly points out,

the money is passed to the Welsh Government, who then have declined so far to pass it on to the police forces affected. He is right to say that the Home Office has stepped in to fund it this year and in the past, but I urge him to speak to his Labour colleagues in Wales to get them to pass on the money, which has been given to them, after being taken from the police forces in the form of the levy.

**Gerald Jones:** The Minister really should go away and do his homework. This issue was taken up by his colleagues in the Wales Office team and correspondence has been exchanged. I appreciate that this is a long and complicated issue, but the Home Office is responsible for it, and it should take up its responsibilities and fund the four police forces in Wales in the same way as other police forces are being funded. Welsh police forces are being short-changed, and the responsibility lies with the Government.

Let me return to the cost of living crisis. I urge the Government to listen to the concerns that we have heard over and over again today. There is an urgent need for the Government to listen and to take action on things such as cutting the VAT costs on energy bills and introducing a windfall tax. Those practical steps have been offered to the Government and they really need to take them on board and take action now, for the sake of families right across the United Kingdom.

5.50 pm

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): It seems only a matter of weeks since we were in this place fighting against the UK Government’s now-successful attempts to restrict some of our most precious and long-held fundamental rights. It seems only a matter of weeks because it is. In the previous Session, we battled against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which will strip people of their right to protest, among other terrifying measures; the Judicial Review and Courts Act 2022, which has serious implications for access to justice and the accountability of public bodies; and, finally, the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which is set to treat asylum seekers and refugees in ways that I can describe only as nightmarish. It is exhausting to stand here today facing an almost identical set of challenges in the new legislative programme. Rather than see the Queen’s Speech as a unique opportunity to help people to tackle the cost of living crisis and put some compassion back into the system, the UK Government are just adding to their attacks on people’s rights.

A constituent and friend of mine, Joanna, is a cleaner. On Monday, she said:

“So wages have gone up and my company added a wee bit extra, so not too bad. But today I got my wage slip and my national insurance contribution is now more than my income tax contribution, and it’s taken me back to exactly what I was earning before.”

What in the Queen’s Speech will tackle the issues that everyone out there is worrying about? Energy bills are spiralling out of control, the cost of the weekly shop is absolutely skyrocketing and the impending climate crisis is ever-present. There is nothing in the Queen’s Speech to tackle any of that. It is being left to the likes of my constituent Mandy Morgan, who dreamed up the Scottish Pantry Network and has opened nine shops in the past year. The network charges people a £2.50 membership fee for £15-worth of food, and that food is fresh fruit and vegetables and fresh meat and fish. The network is not just for poor people; it was set up for environmental

reasons as well and tackles food waste. When people go into the network's beautiful shops, they do not have to worry that somebody is going to know that they are on their uppers. I pay tribute to Mandy Morgan for everything she has done and to all the volunteers and staff who work for the network. There are, though, troubles ahead for them, because they are struggling to access the food that they need, and an increasing number of people need their help.

Instead of tackling such issues, the Government are attacking people's rights. We know the old saying about divide and conquer: who do the Government want people out there to blame for all this? As usual, it is those who are already the least powerful and often completely voiceless. This Government thought it was perfectly acceptable to mention, alongside reference to those poor, desperate refugees who are forced to cross the channel in the most perilous of conditions, what they say are plans to help the police to make the streets safer—in the same paragraph of the Queen's Speech. That is a consciously cynical ploy to conflate the two in people's minds. It is a deliberate attack on asylum seekers and refugees.

This Tory Government's shameless propaganda says that anyone who flees persecution and tries to get to safety on these islands is a criminal. And it is working: many people on these islands are doing everything they can to welcome and support refugees—I thank and pay tribute to them, and I thank God for them—but many people repeat the tropes that the Government have so cynically created. It is cynical, deliberate and strategic. We need only to listen back to some of the similarly worded interventions in the last debate on the Nationality and Borders Bill from Government Back Benchers who had never previously shown an interest.

Today, the attacks have moved to those of us who support refugees. I was disgusted to hear the Home Secretary refer to those of us on the Opposition Benches as defenders of “murderers” and “paedophiles”. I understand that it is apparently okay to do that in this place as long as it is not directed at an individual, so I will be writing to her and asking her whether she believes me to be a defender of murderers and paedophiles. I encourage everyone in here to do the same because we deserve an answer.

This Queen's Speech was primed to reinvigorate the Brexit vote, but perpetuating the myth that Brexit is somehow reclaiming our sovereignty is just ridiculous. Doing it at the cost of trashing our rights is plain scary.

I wish to talk briefly on three of the many Bills that I feel most concerned about in this Queen's Speech. The first is the Bill of Rights. It is no secret that the Justice Secretary has a long-held disdain for human rights, or, to put it another way, for people having rights. His book, “The Assault on Liberty: What Went Wrong with Rights” is illuminating if not wholly depressing. Let me give one quote from it:

“The spread of rights has become contagious”—  
well we can't have that—

“and, since the Human Rights Act, opened the door to vast new categories of claims, which can be judicially enforced against the government through the courts”.

Let us not forget the footage from the same year, 13 years ago, which saw him look into the camera and say:

“I don't support the Human Rights Act and I don't believe in economic and social rights.”

Well, I do, as does my party, which is why human rights are entrenched in Scots law. I thank my lucky stars that we have them, more so now than ever. They make sure that, to some extent, we can all stand shoulder to shoulder in society, that we share some of the same rights of access to justice, and that we can all call out the Government—whether it be this one, the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government, past Labour Governments, future Labour Governments or any public body—when they act in a way that undermines our rights. Who on earth would want to do away with that? These are not some legal concepts out of reach for most; they are entrenched in our modern psyche, and people know that they can rely on them to protect them at their most vulnerable moments, or when they need to face the might of the state. That is what the Tories do not like. They do not want people to know that they can be held to account in the courts, and they do not want to be scrutinised. I predict that, when they are out of office, they will perform a complete U-turn on this.

I do love the positive spin though—the Bill of Rights will defend our freedom of speech. Really? That is just as long as we are not outside this place with a megaphone, or stood at the gates of a fracking site. Our freedom of speech will end right there if Government Members get their way. It is nonsense to imply that the perfectly functioning Human Rights Act has somehow stifled our freedom of speech when it has in fact codified protections for freedom of both speech and assembly under articles 10 and 11 of the European convention on human rights. As with so much legislation forced through this place, there is little evidence to support much of what the Government claim in respect of reform of the Human Rights Act. There is an agenda; there are facts, and then there are Government Ministers determined to bend, manipulate and skew the evidence to fit.

Why should the Government be allowed to dictate who can access justice? That is completely at odds with the rule of law and our international obligations to anyone who seeks refuge on these islands. When will the Government realise that this is not what people want? People are lying under immigration control vans to stop deportations. People are physically running to gather together to protect others from Border Force officers. We all know about Kenmure Street in Pollokshields, but last week, on the day of the council elections, SNP council candidates Marianne Mwiki and now Councillor Simita Kumar, stopped campaigning for themselves and staged their own Kenmure Street protest, along with activists from Edinburgh SNP and hundreds of their fellow citizens from all parties and none, when Border Force vans came looking for someone. We just have to look at the number of emails that have come flooding into our inboxes on the Rwanda plan to know that this is not what our constituents want.

Of obvious concern to anyone in Scotland is the adverse effect that this Bill will have on the devolution settlement. The rights enshrined in the Human Rights Act are at the very core of the settlement and, as Scotland's Equalities Minister Christina McKelvie MSP said this morning:

“Changes must not be made without the explicit consent of the Scottish Parliament.”

The Scottish Government want to enhance and extend rights protection, but the UK Government want the opposite. What could the solution possibly be? We will

[Anne McLaughlin]

no doubt be debating this for many months and, although we may be exhausted with it, we are very much up for that debate. However, I do not understand why anyone would believe this measure will somehow cut our ties with the European courts; rather than our rights being brought home, we will be forced to go to Strasbourg to enforce them. Our human rights should not be embroiled in the Tory Brexit fantasy.

On the Public Order Bill, it is no surprise to see the eleventh-hour amendments to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 that were vehemently voted down by the House of Lords returning in the Queen's Speech. Is this the way it is going to work now—democratically rejected clauses will be repackaged and grouped together to form next year's legislation? If the Government can do that after just a few weeks of being told no, what on earth is their argument against Scotland's right to go to the people and revisit the question on Scotland's independence after nine long years? They are leaving themselves with no arguments for refusing a section 30 order; that will not stop them refusing of course, but they have no valid arguments. It is one rule for this Tory Government and another for everyone else. It is a brazen thing for the Home Secretary to do. These clauses did not go unnoticed by the public; they sparked outrage and protest during the passage of the policing Act, and rightly so. The Government are deluded if they think that the people who were willing to stand outside this place and risk arrest and imprisonment are going to lie down and accept this Public Order Bill. They are also deluded if they think that those Members on this side of the House and in the other place will roll over and accept defeat.

**Kit Malthouse:** One of the arguments put in the House of Lords around the clauses the hon. Lady refers to is that they had not been adequately scrutinised by the House of Commons; that is the main argument behind why they were knocked out and, by bringing them back, we will be allowing that scrutiny. I am interested in the hon. Lady's view, however. As she will know, there is currently a protest outside a fuel depot in Scotland where protestors have locked themselves on. Does she support the arrest and removal of those protestors, and their prosecution, and if they are prosecuted and convicted, what penalty does she think they should get?

**Anne McLaughlin:** The Government are constantly doing this: they are constantly trying to suggest that, because we do not like the draconian laws that they want to bring in, we somehow support everybody's right to do whatever they want without any penalty. I am not going to get dragged into that. Instead I tell the Minister that we will continue to fight this issue, because what they are doing is wrong; no matter how dispiriting it gets, we will continue to fight them. Today, on the 41st anniversary of the death of the late, great Bob Marley, I would like to use one of his quotes to explain why:

"The people who were trying to make this world worse are not taking the day off. Why should I?"

We should not, and we absolutely will not. If the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 was a step too far, this Public order Bill is a leap into the realms of a dystopian nightmare.

I want to take a moment to say how pleased I was to see my friend and colleague my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan) back making a speech yesterday. It was emotional for all of us, and not least for her parents and her partner—her fiancé—who were watching up in the Gallery. I was particularly pleased to hear my hon. Friend express support for a fully inclusive ban on conversion therapy for all LGBT people. I absolutely concur with her: absolutely nobody should be subjected to conversion so-called therapy.

I will finish my remarks by saying that I am disappointed. Of course much of this Queen's Speech was predictable, but these measures are not manifesto pledges becoming reality; they are the result of personal agendas and are attacks on the most vulnerable people on these islands. As I asked earlier, where is the compassion? Where is the helping hand or the reassuring support from a Government who are at least partly responsible for the cost of living crisis?

Scotland wants to do things differently—as, I appreciate, do many non-Scottish National party Members on the Opposition Benches. We do want to offer that helping hand; we do want to act with care and compassion; and we do want to welcome people in need, not throw up the shutters and turn them away. The Scottish Government do all of those things, but they do so with one hand tied behind their back. I am ready for this year's challenges but I am also raring for our independence referendum, because when the people of Scotland recognise that the only way to stop tinkering around the edges of dreadful Tory policies and to stop having to spend millions of pounds on mitigating the effect of those policies, thus leaving the Scottish Government with a lot less money to do the things that we as a country want to do, and they reach the conclusion that the only way to have full control over the kind of country we are is to vote yes to independence, I predict that that is exactly what they will do.

6.4 pm

**Anna McMorris** (Cardiff North) (Lab): We know that the backdrop to this year's Queen's Speech is one of real concern and worry. People up and down the country are terrified as they work out how to manage their ever-thinning finances. Working people are having to make sacrifices themselves to feed their children and choose between eating and heating. After 12 years of Tory rule, we are seeing the fabric of our society and our communities being ripped out: services decimated, with no plan in place to put them right, inflation and interest rates going up and a recession now looming.

What are we supposed to say to our children and young people? How are we supposed to reassure them, after 12 years of Tory Government, that they can achieve whatever they want in their future? What is their future? Some children have only ever known a country in which a community centre houses both a food bank and a polling station, or where services are so decimated that there is nothing to do and nowhere to go—consequences of this Tory Government. Those children deserve better. Cardiff North, my constituency, deserves better. Britain deserves better, and after the local elections we know the British people want better. The election results told us that. I am proud that in Cardiff North we have gone from three Labour councillors to 11, and now there are no Tory councils anywhere in Wales.



The Tory-shattering results across Britain saw them lose nearly 500 seats and strongholds such as Monmouth in Wales, Wandsworth and Westminster. I give a special shout-out to Cardiff North's own Paul Fisher, who won a seat here in Westminster against the odds. Labour is a renewed, confident party, but the Conservatives are tired and mired in scandal, with their own candidates even refusing to put the party logo on their election materials.

Right now, people up and down this country are working hard and paying more, but getting less. They need solutions, not tired, empty rhetoric and political soundbites. I am inundated with emails, stopped on the street in Cardiff North and asked again and again what I can do to get this Tory Government to help hard-working families who are seeing bills escalate and having to make huge sacrifices.

One of my constituents, Linda, an elderly pensioner who is struggling to make ends meet, told me that what the Government are doing,

“is torturous and will kill people slowly”—

grave and sinister words to be hearing in 2022. The Government's announcements yesterday do nothing to help to curb the crisis that is crippling her and others in our communities. Here, the Prime Minister is more concerned with saving his own skin than with tackling the real issues that families face: rising prices and taxes and stagnating wages. At every opportunity, the Government have failed to step up and support struggling families.

Where is the windfall tax on oil and gas producers, to save households up to £600, or the much-needed emergency Budget? Perhaps the cost of living crisis is simply a joke to this Government. We saw the Housing Secretary take to the airwaves this morning mimicking and laughing at calls for an emergency Budget. This is not a laughing matter. People need real help right now. Meanwhile, oil and gas producers announce seismic growth—billions—in their profits, propped up by this Government, while they themselves have welcomed our suggestion of a windfall tax to help hard-working families. But the Tories are not on the side of working families—15 Tory tax rises in just two years is evidence of that.

What of the way that Ministers run their Departments, creating chaos and confusion? With many of them too busy focusing on the chaos of their own internal affairs, they are letting criminals off the hook and letting victims down. I am afraid that the hostile environment at the Home Office is just stark. I know that many hard-working civil servants are doing the best they can under these difficult circumstances, but there is only so much they can do under the disconcerting leadership of this Home Secretary. It is clear that the Home Office is not fit for purpose.

Innocent women and children in Ukraine are being targeted, gunned down, beaten, raped and murdered; indiscriminate attacks have continued to destroy homes, hospitals and schools; and Russian rockets strike railway stations. People are rightly fleeing the horrors of war and seeking sanctuary. I feel very fortunate that under a Welsh Labour Government, Wales is a nation of sanctuary for refugees and super-sponsor of those fleeing Ukraine. It is absolutely heartwarming to see how many people in Cardiff North have signed up to the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

The incompetence of the Home Office is having a human cost as it continues to “lose” applications of the families my constituents are sponsoring. My constituent Sarah stopped me in the street a few weeks ago. She has written about this and we have tried to help. She is sponsoring a Ukrainian family with a severely disabled son. They have been unable to flee because their son needs extra assistance, and they were kept waiting and waiting, terrified, because the Home Office lost their visa application. Another of my constituents, Maria, who sponsored a mother and baby, was in utter distress as a Home Office error meant that only the mother was granted a visa, meaning that she would have had to leave her baby behind. This is unimaginable. What a mess to put these families through who are facing such horrors in their own country.

This chaos is affecting not only refugees trying to enter the country, but our own citizens because the Tories are levelling down our communities. Crime is blighting our neighbourhoods because of the 12 years of chronic underfunding to our police forces, our local communities and our services. Victims of crime are being let down and criminals let off the hook. With crime up by 18% under this Home Secretary, prosecutions down and criminals getting off, the Conservatives are clearly not taking crime seriously. The Bills announced in this Queen's Speech do nothing to change that.

We have had six years of waiting for a victims Bill—a victims law. Time and again, under six Justice Secretaries, we have seen no Bill. Under the Tories, hundreds of thousands more criminals are being let off the hook. Victims are being let down and losing faith in the criminal justice system. This Tory Government are playing with people's lives. Of the 300 women across England and Wales who, sadly, are raped, only about 170 of those rapes are reported, while just three make it to a court of law. That is before we even consider the failure of prosecution rates, which have gone down from 8.5% in 2015 to just 1.3%. That demonstrates that victims are nothing more than an afterthought for this Tory Government.

Lastly, what of the climate crisis, the biggest challenge we are facing? Based on the Queen's Speech yesterday, it is one that this Government are hellbent on ignoring. Just a few hours ago, *The Guardian* published an investigation that has found that oil giants are secretly planning 195 carbon bombs—short-term oil and coal projects that will produce greenhouse gases equivalent to a decade of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from China, the world's biggest polluter. Each carbon bomb would result in at least a billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over their lifetime and have catastrophic global impacts, yet nothing announced yesterday by this Government will help avert climate catastrophe. We have a Government who are so caught up in their own mess that they are sending us along a path to our own destruction. We need leadership on this, and the gap between the Government's empty promises and real climate action is disturbing.

Failure to put sustainability and net zero at the heart of the Government's new legislative agenda is a betrayal of future generations. Delivering net zero and nature recovery is the only way to protect people and planet and to create valuable, well-paid, highly skilled jobs and resilient communities. The energy Bill announced in the Queen's Speech yesterday is welcome, but will it include those important elements that we need to see? Will it

[Anna McMorris]

invest in those crucial green jobs? Prioritising energy efficiency, for example, is critical in tackling the cost of living crisis.

By 2025, energy efficiency, clean heat and renewables alone could replace four times the gas we currently import from Russia. The energy Bill is a chance to make right the absences from the energy security strategy by prioritising renewables and energy-efficiency measures that offer a win-win for consumers, business and the environment. We need a mass retrofit programme, slashing household bills, cutting emissions and investing in skills. We know that new onshore renewables are six times cheaper than the cost of running gas plants, but we are yet to see a single piece of evidence that further licensing in either the North sea or fracking would increase UK energy security or lower bills. No more warm words—we have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to get this right. It is imperative that this Government match deeds with words.

This Queen's Speech is little more than a vanity project delivered with the intention of winning back favour with the public. Instead of neglecting and decimating our communities, letting victims down and letting criminals off the hook, let us invest in a nation that we can be proud of. Only Labour can do that.

6.17 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak on Her Majesty's programme for Government for this Session. There are many things to be welcomed in it, and since I am by and large a positive person, I will start with those. I very much welcome the commitment by Government to the modern slavery Bill. It is an issue that I have pursued, and I have supported the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and others in the House on it. It is good news that we will see the end of the use of dubious supply chains and labour. The Uyghur Muslims are one of those groups of people who we are trying to protect. Justice is our topic today, and the Bill is a massive step forward in doing just the right thing, and I fully support it.

I also welcome that the Minister has given a commitment on two occasions in response to questions from our party about those who preach the gospel and preachers on the street. I also welcome the Home Secretary's commitment earlier when she referred to the £187 million for victim support. Some clarification is needed on that, but she was very keen that contact should be made between Westminster and the Northern Ireland Assembly to see how we can make things better.

I very much welcome the national security Bill, because this Government—our Government—have been very clear about how they address issues of national security. Whether it is taking on terrorists—ISIS/Daesh or IRA—or the terrible atrocities by Russia in Ukraine, our Government stand firm and I thank them for that.

I also welcome the support for nuclear power stations. I ask that Northern Ireland be given consideration as the only part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland that does not have its own power supply. I welcome the change in planning, although I do want to look at how that will work if someone can object and the problems that there will be. There is a planning commitment to providing affordable houses,

however, and I hope that some of that will trickle down to us in Northern Ireland where the planners appear to refuse as standard unless an exceptional case is made to prove why they cannot legislatively prevent something.

My note of caution is that that change cannot be permitted to prevent agricultural growth and our food sustainability goals. I see the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), sitting on the Front Bench, and I know that her commitment is to agricultural growth and food sustainability.

I also welcome the commitment to addressing the issue of those who block the roads, superglue their hands, lie on top of tube trains and are basically obstructive—I spoke to the Home Secretary about that earlier. I have protested legally on many occasions and I was born in a decade when protesting was the norm, as my right hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) said, so I understand the importance of it. I also understand, however, that people should not stop other people getting to work, nurses turning up for their job or a man earning his money. I express concern about something that I read in the press last week about a lady who was fined and jailed for taking her child to school. I have spoken to the Minister and I hope that that matter can be reviewed satisfactorily.

The hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) referred to the review of cold cases, which is an interesting point. Coming from Northern Ireland, I am a great believer in that and I would like to see cold cases where nobody has been made amenable being investigated.

This debate is about delivering justice and we need to deliver justice for the Northern Ireland protocol. That should have been made a priority—there is no other way of putting it. The Government have repeated time and again that the Good Friday agreement is at the heart of negotiations, which I support, but they have repeatedly failed to prioritise Northern Ireland's constitutional place within the United Kingdom. The accountability in relation to the protocol lies with Westminster and it is crucial to the political stability of Northern Ireland that the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland listen to the concerns of the people.

The cost increase of an increasing number of goods in Northern Ireland is a clear result of the protocol. Removing the restrictions forced on us by the EU should be a priority of the Brexit freedoms Bill. I remain disappointed that we did not see that in the Queen's Speech, but I am encouraged by the fact that the Prime Minister has had meetings and that the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs has said in the papers in the last two days that the Government intend to take action. I have heard words of action before, but I believe in actions of action, so I look forward to seeing what will happen in the next period of time in relation to that. I know that it is not an easy job to do.

To give an example, a businessman in my constituency who supplies shops in every corner of the Province told me that some of his nationalist friends—people with a different political opinion who are his friends—had asked whether the DUP, my party, would be able to get the protocol sorted. My friend said, quite rightly, "Go and speak to your own MP," but they said, "My MP is a nationalist MP and he wouldn't like it if I spoke to him."

On behalf of all those across the Province who have been crippled by the protocol, whatever their religious persuasion and political opinion, I share with this Chamber the tales they have told.

In Belfast last week, the elections sent a clear message that all Unionist candidates oppose the protocol and the number of Unionists vastly outnumbers those of a nationalist point of view. People are facing rising costs for power and transporting goods. Increasingly, to save hassle, they are sourcing from other places when they want to buy their goods from the United Kingdom and the mainland. We need action to rectify the mistakes made.

I listened with great respect to the comments of the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) yesterday. She said that, when she negotiated the deal, she had designed one to respect the Northern Ireland position. I wholeheartedly disagreed with her, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell). We were sacrificed to secure the deal, and we have paid enough. The Brexit freedoms Bill must give us back our freedom, and I believe the freedom to buy British goods must be part of that. We want the same opportunity as people have elsewhere. It is little wonder that my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley is waiting to see the substance of scrapping the protocol, not more suggestions for tweaking it. It is not tweaking we want; as I think the paper says, it has to be absolutely done away with, and that is what the Foreign Secretary was saying.

As one businessman said to me, “We are trying to rebuild after covid, yet if we build on a non-stable foundation”—I could be biblical on this, but I will not be—“the structure will tumble”. The Northern Ireland protocol is not a stable foundation, and unless we have one soon, businesses will crumble and the cost of living will skyrocket further. Again, I ask the Government to do the right thing, and I put that on record. If we are going to deliver justice, and that is what we are about—everyone in this House is delivering justice—then the justice has to be that the Northern Ireland protocol is ditched.

Stormont only works with consensus. We do not have a system of majority rule, as many of my hon. Friends have pointed out over the past few years, but power sharing. If Unionists are not on board, there can be no power sharing. Let us get it right, and get our people into positions on a stable foundation. This is a priority. The priority should not be cultural expressions or an Irish language Act, for instance; it should be enabling people to heat their home, feed their family and access medical care. Those pushing for limited finances to be spent in other ways need to go into the estates and into pensioners’ bungalows, and to look these struggling people in the face. Every right hon. and hon. Member who has spoken today has mentioned the cost of living, and rightly so. We must address all those issues, and we need to do it well.

I have one last point on the Queen’s Speech, which is about the legacy issue. The right hon. Member for Maidenhead very kindly let me intervene on her about this yesterday. I want to put on record my concerns about any legacy Bill that does not address totally, fully and in a very embracing fashion those who have lost loved ones in the troubles.

I think of many people I know, and I think of them often. I think of the Ballydugan Four, and I knew three of those boys extremely well. They were murdered, and I will be at a church service on Sunday to remember them some 32 years after they were murdered. Nobody has been made accountable, and I want justice for those families—I say that because they are my constituents, but I say it because I mean it as well. I want justice for Stuart Montgomery, who was murdered outside Pomeroy many years ago. He was only 18 years old, just out of the police training college, and never has anybody been made accountable for him. I want justice for those in La Mon who were murdered in a violent way, I want justice for those in the Abercorn and I want justice for those in the Darkley gospel hall. No one from the IRA has been made accountable for what they did on those occasions. I want justice for those who carried out the Kingsmill massacre and the Omagh atrocity. Those are the things I need to see. I want justice for my cousin Kenneth Smyth, who was murdered by the IRA. No one has ever been made accountable for him.

When it comes to the legacy, the legacy I want from this Government is a legacy for my constituents, my families, my relatives and the people of Northern Ireland who want justice to be done to those who murdered their loved ones and have never seen anything happening for it. A mother’s tears are the same regardless of their political persuasion or religion, and each deserves compassion, respect and, above all, truth. I have real concerns that the Bill will not provide this, and I will be anxious to see the detail of all the legislation and to listen to the views of the victims. They do not have law centres behind them or millions of pounds of public money, but simply miss their loved ones and do not want them to be forgotten. These people have paid a daily cost, and we cannot leave anyone behind while it is clear that Northern Ireland must move forward together.

I welcome the economic crime Bill. I also welcome the Bill to reform the Mental Health Act. I will watch how that goes, but others have spoken about it. I will conclude by saying that I welcome Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech, but I am asking her Government to do the right thing by us in Northern Ireland. They should do the right thing constitutionally for us, but also do the right thing practically, such as by directing funding to help with the cost of living, addressing the waiting lists and educating our children. They must put political aims on the back burner, and work practically towards ensuring that every home can afford heat, light and food. Those are rudimentary things, yet things that too many homes feel they must choose between. This I believe cannot be accepted in any region of this glorious United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—always better together.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the shadow Secretary of State, Steve Reed.

6.29 pm

**Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op):** I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones), for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher), for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), for Preston

[Steve Reed]

(Sir Mark Hendrick), for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) and, of course, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) for making some really thoughtful contributions. They have made it clear in the debate that the Conservative party has gone high on tax and is now also soft on crime. What a sorry situation for a party that once proudly stood for the precise opposite of the record that it now holds.

The Conservative Government took 21,000 police officers off our streets. They closed courts, created a backlog of nearly 60,000 cases and targeted cuts on the youth services that prevent crime at source. At every stage in the criminal justice system, the Government have let criminals off and let victims down, and now we have this thin, meagre Queen's Speech, offering nothing to put that right.

As we have heard from Opposition Members, the Conservatives have promised a victims Bill in every Queen's Speech since 2015, and yet, seven years on, a Bill has still not appeared in Parliament. Yesterday, we were promised only a draft Bill, meaning that it will take even longer to become law. A victims Bill should be at the centre of the legislative programme, not an afterthought, because the Government have let victims down for far too long.

It is nothing short of scandalous that only 1.3% of reported rapes ever result in a prosecution; the other 98.7% never reach court. In those rare cases where a prosecution actually happens, the average delay in getting to court has now exceeded 1,000 days for the first time ever. Rape survivors deserve so much better than this. Letting an offender walk free for nearly three years—especially when so many of them live in the same neighbourhood as the person they attacked—is a major contributing factor in why so many cases are dropped. At a time when rape involving a knife has gone up by nearly 10%, the Government have effectively decriminalised rape.

The Home Secretary—I am sorry that she is not in her place—mentioned paedophilia in her opening speech. Let me respectfully remind her that her party ignored the child victim of the predatory former Conservative MP for Wakefield and allowed him to stand as its candidate. She might reflect on that before she debases herself with slurs against other parties ever again. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler) did not hear what the Home Secretary said from the Dispatch Box. Those comments are directed at what she said, and she debased her office in how she said it.

Labour proposed a victims Bill that would have put victims and survivors back at the heart of the criminal justice system, but the Government refused to work with us. We can only conclude, after seven years of delay and dither, low prosecution rates and eye-watering court delays, that they just do not care about victims. A fundamental part of supporting victims is catching the criminals who offended against them in the first place, but the Government's police cuts are so extreme that they have effectively decriminalised many of the crimes that worry people the most. They fail to prosecute 93% of reported robberies, 95% of violent assaults, 96% of thefts, 99% of reported rapes and 99.9% of reported cases of

fraud. Shops and supermarket managers say that the police no longer come to arrest shoplifters, so there has been an explosion of shoplifting to order. The criminals march in and unload what they like off the shelves— [Interruption.] I suggest the Minister for Crime and Policing, the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) speaks to some supermarket managers in his constituency. The criminals march in and unload what they like off the shelves and there is no one to stop them. If there are not enough police because the Conservatives took them off the streets, they cannot catch the criminals. It really is as simple and commonsensical as that.

Fraud is the fastest-growing crime of all. Scammers target people's life savings and bank accounts with ever more intricate online schemes. We have recently even seen low-life criminals set up fake funds claiming to be helping Ukrainians, when they are just fraudsters helping themselves to decent people's money. Yet the Business Secretary of this Conservative Government tells us fraud is not a real crime. No wonder their own fraud Minister resigned in disgust at the Government's failure to take these serious crimes seriously.

The Government are also letting down the victims of violent crime. Custodial sentences for knife offenders have fallen to the lowest level for seven years. Almost half of all knife offenders dodged jail because the Conservatives broke their election pledge of “two strikes and you're out”. I know from my time as a council leader how to cut violent youth crime. My council reduced it by— [Interruption.] Conservative Members might scoff and laugh, but my council reduced it by a third in 18 months. [Interruption.] I suggest the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) listens to this. We did it by investing in better support for parents, more community-led projects that divert young offenders away from crime, and tougher enforcement against law breakers. It works, but this Government have done the polar opposite. They have presided over a 70% cut in youth service funding that has left some areas with no funding at all—zero funding. They have closed 750 youth centres and sacked 4,500 youth workers who did vital work steering the most vulnerable young people away from crime.

Drug and alcohol addiction lies behind many criminals' offending. They steal to feed their habit and their habit often makes them more violent. We would expect any serious Government to tackle that, but the Conservatives have done the opposite. The House of Commons Library found that, thanks to this Government, £100 million a year less was spent on tackling drug and alcohol addiction in the three years to 2020, a decision that is right now fuelling crime. Under the Conservatives, a prisoner is more likely to leave prison addicted to drugs than when they first arrived. The think-tank Reform tells us that one in seven prisoners are now addicted to drugs, more than double the figure five years ago.

Under the Conservatives, our prisons have become colleges of crime that breed offending, instead of places of punishment and rehabilitation that prevent it. It is alarming how many serious criminals walk out of jail at will. In February, the dangerous sex offender Paul Robson walked out of HMP North Sea Camp. In March, the murderer Shane Farrington walked out of HMP Thorn Cross. [Interruption.] The Minister for Crime and Policing should take responsibility for the Government's record

after 12 years in power. This Government should never have allowed such dangerous criminals to be placed in a low category prison where they could simply walk out and menace the public. With drugs and violence running out of control in our prisons, we are seeing more prisoners leave prison to commit even more serious crimes afterwards. Over the last decade, 685 ex-offenders have been convicted for murders committed after they were released. More than a third of those murders were committed between 2018 and 2020, showing that the rate of the most serious reoffending is speeding up under this Government.

Terrorism worries everyone in this country. We heard some heartfelt contributions today, for instance from Members talking about the horrific attack that targeted young people at the Manchester Arena. We remember those victims with great sorrow in our hearts. Of the last four major terrorist attacks, three were carried out by prisoners released on licence and one by a serving inmate. So it beggars belief that the Justice Secretary wants to blunder ahead with his ill-conceived plan to rip up protections against terrorism in his bonfire of British people's rights. This country's security services have explained in *The Times* that his plans will make it harder to deport dangerous foreign terrorists, and in some cases, terrorists could get away with their crimes because of the reforms in the Queen's Speech.

Our security services give evidence to the British courts in secret for terrorism cases. That is necessary so that their sources and operations are not exposed to the terrorists that they are tracking down. Under the Government's disastrous proposals, however, these cases would have to be heard in Strasbourg at the European Court where secret evidence is not allowed. Rather than exposing their agents, the security services would be forced to drop cases and let terrorists walk free. The Government's warped ideology threatens to put the British people at greater risk of terrorist attacks. It is our job in the Opposition to stop them doing that.

This Government have gone soft on crime. They do not prosecute criminals because they cut the police by 21,000. They do not punish criminals because they do not catch them in the first place. Our prisons have become drug-addicted colleges of crime and the Government cut the diversionary programmes that knock low-level offenders off the crime escalator, so they then progress on to more serious forms of offending.

Labour's approach would be so very different. We would put victims at the heart of the criminal justice system with a strengthened victims Bill. We would make offenders pay back communities with new community and victim payback orders that stop young offenders in their tracks, and we would let victims choose the work that offenders have to carry out. We would crack down on drugs in prison and keep dangerous prisoners in high-security prisons that they cannot walk out of. We would set up new neighbourhood crime prevention teams in every community, bringing together police, youth workers, mental health services and, importantly, victims' representatives to tackle the causes of crime and antisocial behaviour. While the Conservatives sack the police, we back the police, and we would put more of them back on the streets catching criminals.

Under this Prime Minister, crime is up 18% and prosecutions are down 18%. Perhaps it is no surprise that the Government have gone soft on crime when they

are led by people who break the law themselves. The Leader of the Opposition has promised to resign if he is issued with a fine for breaking covid lockdown rules. The Prime Minister broke those laws repeatedly and shamelessly, yet he hopes to cling on to office. That sends criminals a very dangerous message: if the Prime Minister does not obey the law, why should they? This Government are led by law-breakers who believe that laws are for the little people. No wonder they have gone soft on crime; no wonder they are letting criminals off and letting victims down.

6.42 pm

**The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):**

It is my pleasure and great honour to close this day of debate on the Gracious Speech, with a particular focus on preventing crime and delivering justice. The past two years have been immensely challenging, but thanks to the efforts of public servants across our criminal justice system, the public have been protected and justice has continued to be served.

As the Minister for Crime and Policing, I want to start by paying tribute to our brave police officers for their tireless commitment to keeping the public safe, which has remained steadfast throughout the immense challenges of the pandemic and as we continue our covid-19 recovery. As a joint Minister between the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, I know that hard work and dedication have been no less evident at the other end of the system, from our court staff, legal professionals and the judiciary. Their efforts have kept the wheels of justice turning so that we can drive down the court backlog, rebuild a better, stronger system and bring swifter justice for all.

I have listened to today's long debate with interest and I am grateful to Members on both sides of the House for their contributions. There was clearly a common theme across pretty much all the speeches this afternoon—that is, a strong concern, shared by the Government, about the cost of living challenge being felt up and down the nation, bringing difficult choices to houses and homes across the country. The Government have moved quickly to inject £22 billion through various means into people's pockets, particularly focused on households who have less money to spend on a daily basis. I know that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister are monitoring the situation on a daily basis.

Over the next few months, the cost of living will be even more of a challenge, given the Bank of England forecast, and it is the duty of all of us in Government to do what we can to alleviate the burden on our fellow citizens. This is a Queen's Speech laying out a legislative agenda for the next Session, rather than a Budget laying out a fiscal or taxation agenda, but I am confident that when it comes to that point, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will do what he needs to do to support households in this country, as he has done in the past.

We have had a variety of contributions this afternoon, falling broadly into three categories. First, there were the constructive contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) talked about antisocial behaviour in his constituency, a theme we heard from several hon. Members. The three graces—my hon. Friends the Members for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) and for Dudley North

[Kit Malthouse]

(Marco Longhi)—expressed strong support for the Public Order Bill. The general theme was expressed pithily by my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough:

“We want criminals to be scared of the law. We do not want the law-abiding majority to be scared of criminals”—

a sentiment with which the Government heartily agree. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) made his usual vigorous and wide-ranging contribution, illustrating neatly why his part of the world is becoming more of a Conservative stronghold with every month that passes.

Our friends from Northern Ireland, on the other side of the Irish sea, also made constructive and thoughtful contributions and expressed support for our measures to deal with guerrilla-style protests. I heard very clearly their concerns about the Northern Ireland protocol; I know that the Prime Minister and the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs are engaged intensively in trying to solve the problems that the protocol is bringing to that part of the country.

Happily, from the Opposition Benches, the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) took us through the very welcome renaissance in the fortunes of St Helens, a town that I know well from my upbringing in the north-west. He seemed to miss the bit of his speech where he was grateful for the Government’s contribution to that renaissance—not least the £360,000 that theusb council received to help with rough sleeping in the town, with which it has been remarkably successful. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) was very gracious about the Government’s work in his constituency, which I hope is bringing great prosperity and success to his part of the world. I am grateful for his contribution.

Then, I am afraid, we had a variety of contributions that were all variations on the theme of “Everything Conservative bad, everything fill-in-the-blank-for-my-party excellent, good, brilliant silver bullet-style solutions.” The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) seemed to be happy for protesters to be punished through the civil courts but not the criminal courts, which is a rather confused stance. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) really needs to reflect on how the various problems with crime in her city that she raised should be the priority of the Labour police and crime commissioner; I hope that she will have an assertive conversation with her, as she was assertive in her contribution. The hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) blamed the Government, strangely, for members of Action Fraud catching covid; hopefully they will recover soon.

It is always good to hear from the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon). It is excellent to know that the Corbynite heart of the Labour party is beating strongly. Fear not, my friend: your time will come again, we all hope. In the vigorous contribution from the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), among the expected attacks on us there was food for thought about the perhaps more sensitive issues that we will have to face during the Session.

A couple of west midlands Members, not least the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher), put the fall in West Midlands police numbers down to the Government. In fact, there is very little that we can do if there have been Labour police and crime commissioners who have not prioritised the maintenance of police numbers over the past 10 years. Many police forces across the country have the highest number of police officers in their history—not least the Metropolitan police, because those who have had custodianship of the finances of that force over the past decade or so have made the right choices. I cannot compensate for the poor choices that police and crime commissioners have made in the past 10 years, much as I would like to. I hope that when we reach the successful recruitment of 20,000 police officers, which I forecast will be towards the end of this year, people will reflect on the decisions that they made over the decade and on where those decisions have put them at the end of the process. Finally, we heard from the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), who seems to fail to realise that a commitment to net zero is, I am proud to say, a matter of law which cannot be avoided by this or, indeed, any subsequent Government.

That brings me to the chief dystopians, the pair on the Opposition Front Bench. In his closing speech, the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) went into some kind of weirdo rant at the end, filled, I am afraid, with misrepresentations and—am I allowed to say “half-truths”? I do not know whether or not that is parliamentary language.

The strange thing is that so eager are the Opposition to attack, so eager are they to push for all-out frontal assault, that they forget the collateral damage. In their speeches, they attack the police; all those brave police officers are, apparently, callous and uncaring. As for the Home Office, the thousands of Home Office staff are unfeeling, inefficient, and similarly callous about those who seek their services. Given that most Labour Members represent areas with Labour police and crime commissioners, however, they are actually attacking their colleagues for their lack of thought and care. The general parts of their speeches do not really require a detailed response, not least because these are the same attacks that we heard in the run-up to the 2019 election. As I have said, they were all variations on a theme, and I suspect that we will get the same result at the next election unless they change their tune.

We did, however, hear three thoughtful contributions which struck me in particular. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Sir Robert Syms) raised not just crime and justice issues, but the old-fashioned issue of monetarism as a key part of our economic approach. That is something with which I have strong sympathy, and no doubt it will come to the fore as we look towards our cost of living challenge.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) put his finger on an issue that has been particularly neglected, and I was interested to hear about the all-party parliamentary group on issues affecting men and boys. He said that if we had 1,000 cars and three went wrong, we would not damn all those 1,000 cars but would try to work out why the three had gone wrong. I think that was a very strong analogy, and I hope that he and I can work together in the months to

come to solve some of the problems that we undoubtedly see in the criminal justice system involving men and boys.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), for whom I have enormous respect, obviously had to go through the standard attacks on the Conservative party to satisfy central command in Scotland, but her thoughts on the Bill of Rights, conversion therapy and online rights were well worth listening to, and gave pause for thought. I will be sending copies of her speech to the various Ministers so that they can consider what she said. She is obviously a legal brain to be reckoned with, so we should do exactly that.

It was hard to discern, amid the fury from the Opposition Front Benchers, what they were likely to support in the coming Session, but I am pleased to say that in our part of the Government universe we have a number of Bills which I think will make a significant difference to the British people.

The National Security Bill will enhance the safety of the British public and protect our vital interests from those who seek to do the UK harm, making good on our manifesto commitment to ensure that the security services have the powers that they need. I assume that Opposition Front Benchers will support that. The protect duty Bill will introduce new legal requirements for public locations and venues to ensure that they are prepared for and protected from terrorist attacks; I assume that they will support that as well. I know that they will support the Public Order Bill, because the Leader of the Opposition called for more assertive action during the recent fuel protests, and I expect to see support for it in the Lobby. We have already heard from the Front Benchers that they want to support the economic crime Bill, and we hope to work constructively with them in ensuring that we are all safe online and able to deny the proceeds of crime to those who wish to make money from exploiting our fellow citizens. The Online Safety Bill has been subject to a great deal of discussion in the House and elsewhere about how we should start to police the online world in the same way we police the offline world. No doubt there will be challenges along the way, but I am sure that we can reach a settled view.

I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) for her contribution on algorithms. She will remember that we are, I think, the first Government in the world to have a register of algorithms that can be looked at by those who understand them, although I am not saying that I necessarily would. There is scope for the House to come together to protect the vulnerable and, in particular, children, and to ensure that we deal with offending online.

I know that the modern slavery Bill will garner support from across the House. A number of Members from both sides of the House have mentioned their desire to

strengthen protections in that area. The victims Bill has been a little time coming, but I am glad to say that it will be laid shortly, I hope, in draft form for pre-legislative scrutiny, as it should be. Everyone wants to put victims at the heart of the criminal justice system, and we have done an enormous amount to support them over the last couple of years, spending significant money on support mechanisms for them, but there is always more we can do. We want victims to be supported, but our primary aim is that there should be fewer of them, and the work that we are doing across the whole of the criminal justice system and policing will achieve that.

Finally, we come to the Bill of Rights, which should ensure that our human rights framework meets the needs of the society it serves and commands public confidence, and that where perceived and actual abuses of our human rights laws are ended, we can restore a bit more common sense to the criminal justice system. We need to strengthen our common-law traditions, particularly now as we exit the European Union, and we have to reduce our reliance on Strasbourg case law.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary set out earlier in this debate, the first job of any Government is to keep their people safe, which is why we are delivering ambitious reforms to do just that by cutting crime, delivering swifter justice and making our streets safer. We are backing the ever-growing numbers of police with the tools and support they need, making sentences tougher for violent and sexual crimes, strengthening victims' rights and restoring confidence in the criminal justice system. We will ensure that we strike the right balance in our human rights framework so that it meets the needs of the public and commands their confidence, strengthens our traditions of liberty, particularly the right to free speech, adds a healthy dose of common sense and curtails abuses of our justice system. I commend the Government's programme on crime and justice to the House.

*Ordered,* That the debate be now adjourned.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

*Debate to be resumed tomorrow.*

#### INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 150D),*

That this House:-

(1) takes note of the report of the Independent Expert Panel, *The Conduct of Mr Liam Byrne MP, HC 1272* in the last session of Parliament, and the recommendation for sanction of a suspension of two sitting days;

(2) accordingly suspends Liam Byrne from the service of the House for two sitting days, namely Thursday 12 May and Monday 16 May; and

(3) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 45A, directs that Mr Byrne's salary shall be withdrawn for two days, from Thursday 12 May till Friday 13 May.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

*Question agreed to.*

## UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Rural Areas

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

6.57 pm

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): When people think of levelling up, what often comes to mind is cities that have been left behind, areas of the north whose industries have changed and towns where inequalities are often blatant and impossible to miss, but how often are the needs of rural communities considered within that discussion? I know that they are largely absent from the media debate on this issue and I suspect that they rarely get a look-in in Whitehall. This is the crux of why I stand here this evening: rural communities can be forgotten no more. Too many of them have been left behind, and they deserve to be levelled up too.

One fifth of the UK's population live in rural areas, so this debate is of great consequence to very many. We too need support to access the opportunities our communities need to succeed. I recognise that this is not straightforward, because in rural areas poverty is often hidden. Barriers to social mobility can be more difficult to observe in rural areas, and it costs more to deliver services in those areas. Another issue is that deprivation is used as a key determinant of funding, but with no recognition of the fact that rural poverty should be considered within this because of the added cost of accessing services in rural areas, which deprives many of access. A focus in policy making on urban and industrial growth has come at the expense of those who do not live in large cities, and this has been made worse by underinvestment in critical infrastructure and local government funding, particularly in areas of the east midlands.

**Jane Hunt** (Loughborough) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. The national figure for this year's funding settlement is £128 per person, but Leicestershire County Council gets only £85 per person.

**Alicia Kearns:** My beloved hon. Friend is absolutely right. If Leicestershire were funded the same as Surrey, it would get something like £104 million more, which I will address in more detail shortly.

7 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

**Alicia Kearns:** Rural prosperity has been stifled, and the rural powerhouse campaign estimates that closing the rural productivity gap would add £43 billion of gross value added to our economy.

I convey a simple request to the Minister: that the Government make sure they do not leave rural areas behind; that the Government promise to level up rural areas; that he sends a delegation of civil servants to my constituency—they could also pop across the border to his constituency—to see the challenges faced by our rural authorities; that he considers creating a rural capital investment fund; and that he establishes a rural deprivation unit in his Department.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. As the MP for the rural constituency of Strangford, this subject is close to my heart. I look forward to the Minister's response.

Does the hon. Lady agree that many rural businesses would be successful online if only they had more support specifically designed to help those in rural areas and that some of the shared prosperity fund should be allocated for specialists in rural business to provide training and support?

**Alicia Kearns:** I could not agree more. Rural businesses also require more support to access the broadband they need to establish and grow.

I welcome the UK shared prosperity fund, which is a central pillar of our levelling-up agenda. It rightly focuses on local stakeholders and letting local people have their say, but I would like to raise the concerns expressed to me by Harborough District Council, Melton Borough Council and Rutland County Council.

First, rural districts and local authorities have been prescribed relatively small proportions of funding. That is not a surprise to many of us, but I hope it can be rectified. Secondly, local flexibility risks being constrained by the fund's pre-specified outcomes. Finally, the yearly spending requirements limit our ability to maximise investment spend over the fund's duration.

For the shared prosperity fund to be most successful, we have to focus on long-term investments, but a closer inspection of the 2021-22 Red Book shows that there will be no dedicated, ring-fenced funding for rural businesses, which will hit communities like the hon. Gentleman's and mine hardest. Shared prosperity begins with the recognition that different areas have different needs, and my good friend the Minister knows my constituency of Rutland and Melton and the Vale of Harborough villages very well. In many ways, our communities are the same. They are idyllic and have an enormous sense of community. Their big-heartedness and friendliness is heartfelt and deep, and we have the picturesque rolling hills of England. Uppingham, one of my three towns, was voted the best place to live in the east midlands, and Melton was voted sixth.

We have industries that people might not associate with rural areas. Samworth Brothers makes the majority of sandwiches in this country, and Arnold Wills makes the majority of belts. We have the Hanson cement quarry, Mars Petcare, C S Ellis, which is an amazing national haulage company, and Belvoir Fruit Farms, and of course our stilton and pork pies are enjoyed around the world.

We love and want to protect our rural way of life, but we need support. Delivering services in rural areas is more expensive, rural economies are more susceptible to skills shortages, our physical and digital connectivity lag behind other parts of the UK and the geographical spread of our communities can obscure the nature of the issues that people face.

The relative affluence of some parts of Rutland and Melton means that some pockets of deprivation are too often overlooked by Government policy, which is to the detriment of rural communities. Rutland ranks in the bottom 10% of the entire country for social mobility, and I believe rurality plays a large role in that, alongside insufficient Government support. I know that the Secretary of State



is especially interested in tackling these pockets of deprivation, and that is where a rural deprivation unit within his Department would make a fundamental difference. Such a unit would help it consider and understand the complex nature of rural inequalities and make sure that local investment plans take it into account. It would provide a renaissance for our rural communities.

I come to local government funding, an issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Jane Hunt) rightly raised. For too long, communities in Leicestershire and in Rutland and Melton have been coming second. Despairingly, Leicestershire is the lowest-funded county council per head in England, while Rutland County Council is expected to raise significantly more revenue through local taxation than other local authorities in England. The east midlands has the lowest level of public investment of any region in England. How can we have shared prosperity when long-term funding settlements are so unfavourable to rural areas? This is a bold and ambitious agenda, but how can our councils do more with less? We desperately deserve the funding we need.

Rutland County Council has been an effective unitary authority for many years and we are proud of our independence. We ranked No. 1 on the Impower index as the highest performing council on adult social care in the country, but we have forecast a budget gap for 2023-24 onwards. We are required to raise a shocking 80% of our revenue through taxation, whereas the national average for councils is just 60%. That means that the council tax for a band D property in Rutland is £2,200 a year, and we are talking about a council in the worst 10% for social mobility in our country. We receive £331 less Government funding per household than other councils and we have the highest council tax in the country. That is not good enough and it is not fair.

Let us then look at the position for Leicestershire County Council, in which the Melton, Vale and Harborough parts of my constituency sit. As I mentioned, if LCC was funded at the same level as Surrey, it would have £104 million more to support people across Leicestershire. This situation cannot be right, and we need fair funding. I am pleased to have secured productive meetings between Rutland County Council and the Minister for Levelling Up Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch). I hear and hope that future funding settlements will be provided earlier to allow for better local planning, but they also need to be richer. My Leicestershire colleagues and I have worked tirelessly since our elections to try to get the Department to pay heed to this unfair imbalance. I know that it is not easy or straightforward, and that budget would be required, but we must rectify these injustices. I have raised the issue of them time and again, and I hope the Department will pay attention to them.

Let me move on to the issue of rural transport. Strong transport links are all the more crucial in rural settings, and it is fantastic that the shared prosperity fund is taking transport into account. After 40 years of promises, hope and let-down dreams, and through working with the Minister's Department, the Melton Mowbray distributor road is finally being built in my constituency. It is going to transform the town centre of Melton and bring £160 million of investment into our amazing town. However, we have wider rural transport concerns that continue.

Community renewal is highly dependent on good transport services, but we have had recent reductions in all of our transport services, which threatens to undermine our rural growth. In Melton, the No. 19 bus between Melton and Nottingham has been cut, not only because it was being under-used, but because it would no longer be financed. Workers and students are no longer able to get from rural Melton to Nottingham for work or for educational opportunities, and businesses are suffering, as, in particular, are those with special educational needs.

In rural areas, those with SEN suffer so often because it is so difficult for them to access the services they need. I am hopeful that I can mitigate some of the loss of that bus service with the reinstatement of the train service from Melton to Nottingham; currently, there is no direct service and we have to go through the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough and through Leicester. The Government kindly provided £50,000 of funding to look at my proposal to reopen it. I politely ask the Minister to remind his colleagues at the Department for Transport that we are waiting to hear back on our bid, having made our business case.

In Rutland, Centrebus is only continuing the Rutland Flyer bus and the 747 routes after demanding additional subsidies from Rutland County Council. Given what I have just said about our funding issues in Rutland, Members can see why having to subsidise a bus route is an additional burden that the council cannot take on. The Government have promised to bring forward new arrangements for rural transport in the summer, and I urge them to act now to support faltering rural transport services, because that will provide a boost.

**Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate on support for rural communities. Levelling up throughout the entire United Kingdom must include rural communities. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, on which I serve, is in the midst of a rural mental health inquiry. According to the evidence we have taken, much of the stresses and pressures on rural communities are exacerbated by rural isolation, by the things that happen in rural communities—such as animal disease outbreaks and flooding—and by connectivity issues, with people unable to get from A to B, as my hon. Friend is explaining passionately. Does she agree that central Government should work with local government to mitigate ruralisation by allocating funding for rural bus services and broadband for rural communities, to make sure people can be connected and stay together?

**Alicia Kearns:** My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. Whether in respect of combatting loneliness, connectivity, business opportunity or the 150 Ukrainians who are to settle in my constituency—they have started over the past few weeks—the 431 square miles of my constituency are difficult to navigate when there are no bus services.

Let me turn to digital connectivity. We have a digital deficit in rural communities. In 2021, Onward and the National Farmers Union highlighted that only 20% of people in rural areas can access broadband speeds above 24 Mbps. That is not good enough. I was pleased to get Rutland into the first tranche of places in the country that will receive full fibre-optic—that is fantastic:

[Alicia Kearns]

we will get gigabit broadband—but we need it for more communities. [Interruption.] Excuse me, Madam Deputy Speaker—I promise I do not have covid.

On job retention in rural areas, if we are to give rural areas the tools they need, we have to make sure that people know they can remain locally for jobs—I touched on some of the amazing employers in my constituency earlier. To tackle the challenges, we need local authorities to be able to think about the long term. I am concerned that unless the shared prosperity fund can be used to address the root causes of rural inequality, it will have a limited impact on our communities. That is why the Country Land and Business Association has called for the creation of a separate fund for rural capital investment. I urge the Minister to consider that. Rutland and Melton are currently developing a joint levelling-up fund bid that reflects the varied nature of our communities and business interests. I look forward to championing it in Parliament.

Let me turn to health and emergency services—[Interruption.] And I thank the very good friends one can make in this place. The Government have rightly identified health as one of the key pillars of levelling up. A 2019 report found that although older people in rural areas experienced reduced rates of mortality, poor access to services was driving health inequality. People who live in the countryside can have the most incredible, healthy and happy lifestyle, but poor access to services is a meaningful challenge.

Since being elected, I have campaigned for a second GP practice in the town of Melton Mowbray, because I believe Latham House Medical Practice is the most over-subscribed surgery in the country. If nothing changes, 45,000 people will be served by one practice. That cannot be right. When I was elected, I was told that it would take me more than a decade to get us another GP practice; that is not good enough for me and it is not good enough for the people of Melton. I have been working hard with Melton Borough Council, especially its leader Councillor Joe Orson and chief executive Edd de Coverly, as well as with clinical commissioning group chair Andy Williamson, to make sure that we get another practice and do not wait 10 years for it.

There are wider health challenges in Rutland. I promised to save Rutland Memorial Hospital and now have a commitment from the CCG that it will be saved, but we need investment so that those in my local elderly community do not have to go to Leicester—which takes at least an hour—to get ongoing care for chronic conditions. We need new funds and we need to invest in community hospitals. Indeed, yesterday at the Dispatch Box the Prime Minister championed the fact that he fought for community hospitals when he first came to this place, so I hope he will listen and take heed of the fact that we need to invest in them now.

In Rutland, we also face challenges in respect of cross-border working. Constituents of mine access services in Peterborough, Lincolnshire, Kettering, Northamptonshire and Leicester. People in the vale access services in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. We now finally have a requirement that information has to be shared across borders, but there is more to be done.

I wholeheartedly welcome the shared prosperity fund's emphasis on community and place. As the Minister knows, our motto in Rutland is *multum in parvo*—much in little—and we have an abundance of pride in our county. I invite every Member of this House to visit Rutland water. Indeed, a colleague grabbed me earlier and said, “Is Stoke Dry in your constituency?” I said, “Yes, it is. Did you know that's where they launched the gunpowder plot?” He said, “No, I didn't, but I did once I had been there. Aren't you lucky to have that in your constituency?” I said, “Yes, I am.” He then went on to list a number of other villages and towns in my constituency and say how lucky I was.

Rutland is an amazing place to be. The Rutland showground does events such as Birdfair, and we have recently had two incredible archaeological discoveries. The first was the amazing Roman mosaic, found in a farmer's field just 15 minutes from my own home, which tells the story of Achilles and Hector. It has changed our understanding of Roman Britain. In so many movies, Britain is depicted as having hordes of barbarians, but we now know that there were these amazing mosaics. The Roman mosaic is described as one of the most significant discoveries ever made in the UK.

Only a couple of weeks later, there was the discovery of a 180 million-year-old ichthyosaur, the UK's largest and most complete record of the marine reptile, which I had the privilege of touching while it was being dug up. Surely funding from the shared prosperity fund could go towards the promotion of these discoveries. I have no doubt that the scale of them means that we deserve a heritage museum and a heritage trail. We need major investment in our tourism industry that would help counteract the fact that we do not get enough local government funding. It would allow us to stand on our feet, which is all that we are asking for, but we need investment from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and I hope that we can make it a reality.

Melton too has much to celebrate in pride of place. We all know that it is the rural capital of food. We have some of the best farmers in the country who produce world renowned goods such as Melton Mowbray pork pies—yes, I promised in my maiden speech that Members would hear much of those pies and I have clearly not failed to deliver on that. We also have stilton—Tuxford and Tebbutt is the oldest producer in the world, and there is also Long Clawson Dairy. The world's best ale is produced by Round Corner Brewing in Melton. We also have the award-winning Brentingby Gin—it did not win the international award—and Cidentro Cider, which, again, has won awards. We make amazing samosas at Samosa Wallah, and we are also the leading producers of paneer cheese, and of tofu for the Japanese restaurant market. We are the world's capital of food, and food heritage is in our blood. We could be the home of food tourism with help from the Government.

I wish to pay tribute to Melton Borough Council and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, which set up the new Food Enterprise Centre last year. The new Stockyard was launched only two or three weeks ago, which will provide a new opportunity and a haven of food and drink in my constituency.

I previously stated that the shared prosperity fund can deliver outcomes greater than the sum of its parts, but can the Minister elaborate on ways in which we as MPs can access this fund? I was recently contacted by

the trustees of Barrowden village hall, who have, over the past six years, been working on a plan to replace their ageing village facilities. The grants that they had hoped to apply for have been wiped out by covid. We recognise that we are asking for more in a time of less, but they are looking into applying to the community ownership fund to help restore their village hall. The next bidding round is in May, and the project would be a fantastic candidate for the community and place investment priority, so I hope that I have put that on the Minister's radar.

I would also point out that I have been fighting for at least 18 months for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to open its office outside of London in Melton. It is not just that Melton needs DEFRA, but that DEFRA needs Melton. It should not be that our policy officials are reliant on field visits to meet farmers and to understand the rural way of life. We are in the final three to home DEFRA. It is Melton Mowbray, Peterborough and York. What do we notice about that? There are two cities and one rural town in the shortlist. Only one is the rural capital of food. DEFRA should come to Melton and it would get a wonderful home and wonderful support from my colleagues.

In conclusion, for far too long, rural areas have been left behind to the detriment of our society. That is grossly unfair to the Minister's constituents and to mine. We have a levelling-up agenda that allows us to find and tackle these inequalities, but we have to be honest about the scale of the challenges. We need: a fair funding settlement for rural local authorities; investment in rural transport and digital infrastructure; improved rural health services; improved rural mental health services; and a long-term plan for rural culture. If we do this, all the communities of Rutland, Melton and the Vale and Harborough villages will have the chance to succeed. Rutland and Melton are currently tier 2 priority areas in the levelling-up fund, so give us that chance to succeed and support us.

In February, the Secretary of State offered to come to Rutland to see at first hand the opportunities that we have and the challenges that our local authorities face. I ask him to come. My colleagues are always welcome to pop across the border and join me. I hope that we can recognise that when rural communities prosper, so does the rest of the UK. I hope that we will not have to have a debate such as this again during my time as the proud Member for Rutland and Melton.

7.19 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Neil O'Brien):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) on securing a debate on this important topic and on her superb speech. I also acknowledge the important contributions from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friends the Members for Loughborough (Jane Hunt) and for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson), who were making some similar and important points in a debate just a couple of weeks ago.

We should start by recognising that many positive things are happening in Rutland, Melton and the parts of the Harborough district that my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton represents, and many of them are happening because of my hon. Friend.

She has been a relentless champion for fairer funding for Rutland and Leicestershire. She has secured the Melton Mowbray distributor road, which is key to levelling up Melton; after 40 years of discussions, she and local colleagues have finally made it happen. Rutland Memorial Hospital has been saved after the commitment she secured from the clinical commissioning group. She raised broadband, and I am pleased her efforts paid off and put Rutland in the very first tranche of the gigabit upgrades in the country. She also helped secure £150,000 for a community hub in Thurnby and £150,000 for a pub in Frisby from our community ownership funds, and I look forward to drinking in them at some point. Of course, her local authorities have also benefited from funding from the UK shared prosperity fund: Rutland, Melton and Leicestershire are receiving over £5 million of UK SPF funding, with Rutland getting over £1 million, Harborough over £2.1 million and Melton just shy of £1.2 million. On top of that, Leicestershire is receiving nearly £3 million in multiply funding.

On the SPF, my hon. Friend raised a series of important questions about flexibility and rurality which I want to address directly. Even the last Labour Government acknowledged that spending on regional economic policies should have been brought back from Brussels and decided here, but they never managed to bring it back or get the EU to agree to that. Now that we do have control back, we can do things differently. The SPF fund will be radically more flexible than previous EU funding, and also much more locally led. Under the last Labour Government, funding was given to remote and unelected regional development agencies based far from Rutland and Melton; under the SPF, it will be given to individual districts and elected local leaders so it is much more local. In addition, bureaucracy will be slashed and there will be far more discretion over what money is spent on. EU requirements for match funding, which impacted on poorer places in particular, will be abolished. The EU system—with payment in arrears, multiple rounds of auditing and multiple rules, and lengthy application documents that all made it difficult for small local voluntary groups in particular—will be swept away. Under the EU funding, only a narrowly defined set of things could be funded, but under the SPF the investment priorities deliberately cover a very wide range of possible interventions because that is what local leaders said they wanted from us. Whether digital connectivity, buses, skills, improvements to high streets, community events, or sports and festivals, the choice for the first time will belong to local leaders and local communities. Rural communities will be empowered to set and deliver against their own priorities through the fund, shaping things locally and not having to apply to a remote RDA based in a city far away.

In terms of allocations, the SPF matches in real terms the previous spend in each local enterprise partnership area because we were conscious of the need for continuity for ongoing programmes. Within those LEP areas we have used the same index of community renewal that we developed for the community renewal fund. One reason why we used that is precisely because, unlike previous funding formulas, it explicitly recognises the challenges of rurality and sparsity to tackle the very unfairness my hon. Friend raised.

The SPF is only one of the funds we are using to give financial firepower to places. The £4.8 billion levelling-up fund, which recently opened for its second round, could

[Neil O'Brien]

be used to boost some of the fantastic rural food businesses that she mentioned, or to make the most of the incredible cultural discoveries that she also mentioned. She noted that Rutland and Melton were in tier 2; again, that is because the index for the levelling-up fund recognises the challenges of rural and poorly connected areas in a way that previous Governments have not. We have also created new funds such as the community ownership fund, which particularly helps rural communities where hub assets are so important to villages and smaller places. The £3.6 billion towns fund is regenerating communities throughout the country, and there is more to come, with the £1.8 billion brownfield fund mainly still to be allocated, which will help drive regeneration and save valued green spaces.

**Alicia Kearns:** The Minister mentioned community ownership funds. There is a pub in Stathern in my constituency which, having seen the success of the Bell in Frisby, would like to do the same with the Red Lion. When will the next funding round be opening—I know the Department is keen to learn from previous rounds and help people apply for the next round of the community ownership fund?

**Neil O'Brien:** It will be opening extremely shortly. I will take that offline with my hon. Friend, and we have indeed tried to learn lessons to improve that aspect of the fund from the first round.

My hon. Friend raised a number of other critical issues. She talked about the need for more GPs surgeries. I wholly agree, and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill published today responds to exactly that issue and to the campaigning by her and other hon. Members here.

We must ensure that development always comes with the infrastructure that is needed. Section 106 has seen money handed back to developers, which is intensely frustrating for local communities: projects become outdated by the time money is available, money cannot be adequately pooled to add up to major projects, it is not a transparent system and it does not reflect the cumulative effect of development because funds cannot be pooled properly.

The new infrastructure levy that we propose through that Bill will change all that. It means more money for local communities, more of the benefits of development for the local community and not just developers, more local control over what it is spent on and matching of new housing to the infrastructure that is needed.

My hon. Friend also talked about the challenges of digital connectivity in rural areas and her success in the early roll-out. We are investing £5 billion so that hard-to-reach areas can get gigabit speeds. More than 67% of UK premises can now access gigabit-capable broadband, an enormous leap forward from July 2019, when coverage was just 8%. That is a spectacular transformation. The £1 billion that we are investing in the shared rural network will particularly help to improve mobile signal in rural areas such as Rutland and Melton, so that she can spend even more time when she is on the A47 lobbying Ministers with brutal effectiveness.

My hon. Friend talked about the critical issue of local government finance. The overriding ambition of the Government is to keep bills low by giving councils the tools and firepower to keep taxes low while offering first-rate services to their residents. The Russian invasion

of Ukraine has an impact on that and makes the cost of living even more important. Our local government finance settlement for 2022-23 meets that ambition by providing an additional £3.7 billion of funding to local authorities, including support for adult social care reform, which is critical for rural areas with older populations.

In my hon. Friend's constituency, that funding translates to a cash-terms increase in core spending power for Harborough council of 6% compared with last year; for Melton it is a 9.3% increase and for Rutland a 7.4% increase. For Leicestershire County Council it translates to a 6.9% increase compared with the previous year. The new funding we have made available is the largest cash-terms increase in grant funding provided through the settlement in the past 10 years and is testament to the support we are affording councils in every corner of the country, especially those outside our major towns and cities.

My hon. Friend is quite right to say that these things can always be improved, and I am sure she will continue to power forward on this agenda.

**Alicia Kearns:** The Minister is a neighbour of mine, and I just want to point out that without him I do not believe we would have made such progress on fair funding for this country and the improved settlements. While he cannot publicly lobby for his own Market Harborough constituency, I know that all Leicestershire MPs wish to put on record their gratitude to him. Since I cannot ask him to agree with that, I will instead ask him to confirm that he will continue to keep his eye on funding for Leicestershire and Rutland.

**Neil O'Brien:** I am not entirely sure what I should say in answer to that question. Instead, I will finish by thanking my hon. Friend for bringing this very important issue to the House today. In the past, the rural economy has not always had the attention or the credit it deserves, but Governments who undervalue rural communities do so at their peril, and we will never do that.

When I was in Uppingham just the other day on market day, I saw all the attractions and the wonderful things that my hon. Friend's constituency offers in the incredible, vibrant town centre. It is a wonderful place. However, we as a Government also see the challenges of maintaining those rural bus routes and the challenges of an older population. It is wonderful that Rutland has the highest male life expectancy in the entire country, but that brings with it the higher cost of looking after a group of older people well.

Rural places do not have the momentum that larger cities have had, because of the changes to a services-based economy over the past 20 years that have helped capital cities and large cities particularly at the expense of rural areas. We are conscious of those challenges. We have made unprecedented changes to the funding formula to recognise the challenges that for too long, as my hon. Friend said, have been neglected. Under this Government we are addressing those things. I will disagree with one thing she said: she was worried that sometimes these things are forgotten in Government, but I can promise her they will never be forgotten in this Government.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.29 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Wednesday 11 May 2022

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Low-income Workers: Exclusivity Clauses

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully):** I am pleased to announce the latest steps the Government have taken to better protect and support low-income workers as we look to build a high-skilled, high-productivity, high-wage economy.

The UK's flexible and dynamic labour market has always been the envy of the world. It gives businesses the confidence to create jobs and invest in their workforce, whilst giving workers more choice over who they work for, and how often.

This Government want to put more power into the hands of individuals and businesses to find and create work that suits their personal circumstances. Today we are confirming our intention to widen the ban on exclusivity clauses, ensuring the lowest-paid workers have the freedom to boost their income through extra work if they wish.

Exclusivity clauses, which restrict staff from working for multiple employers, were banned in zero hours contracts in 2015. Since then, the number of people on zero hours contracts with a second job has risen, and more workers have been able to take advantage of the opportunity to boost their income. Our latest reform will build on the success of those changes.

The Government proposals will widen the ban on exclusivity clauses which restrict staff from working with multiple employers, to those whose income is below or equivalent to the lower earnings limit at £123 a week. An estimated 1.5 million workers are earning on or below £123 a week and the new reforms will ensure that workers in this group that have exclusivity clauses have the freedom to top up their income with extra work if they choose.

While not everyone will want a second job, the reforms will remove any barriers that currently prevent those who want to do so, and give workers more flexibility over when and where they work to best suit their personal circumstances such as childcare or study.

As well as supporting workers to increase their income, the reforms will also benefit businesses by widening the talent pool of job applicants to those who may have been prevented from applying for roles due to an exclusivity clause with another employer, and also helps businesses to fill vacancies in key sectors like retail and hospitality. The reforms will support low-paid workers to make the most of new opportunities where demand is growing.

The reform will be delivered through new secondary legislation which will be laid before Parliament in due course. It follows a consultation launched by the Government in December 2020, where the majority of responses agreed with the approach to extend the ban to contracts where the workers' guaranteed weekly income is below or equivalent to the lower earnings limit of £123 a week.

Additionally, many responses to the consultation highlighted the impact that covid-19 has had on job security and the decrease in guaranteed working hours for many people. Extending the ban to those earning below or equivalent to the lower earnings limit will therefore enable workers who have been moved to reduced hours contracts due to the pandemic to increase their income by taking on additional work if they wish.

The Government also announced its commitment to publishing employment status guidance, making it easier for individuals and businesses to understand which employment rights apply to them.

This Government have been absolutely clear that we will do whatever we can to protect and enhance workers' rights, and give businesses the confidence to create jobs and invest in their workforce. These reforms will put more power into the hands of individuals and businesses to find and create work that suits their personal circumstances.

[HCWS51]

## TREASURY

### Public Works Loan Board Lending Limit

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):** The Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) is a HM Treasury lending facility to local government. The PWLB passes on central Government's lower cost of borrowing to local authorities to support their delivery of housing, local infrastructure, service delivery and local regeneration. It also helps local authorities to manage their cash flow in a predictable and cost-effective way.

Today, I wish to announce an important step the Government are taking regarding the ongoing effective management of the PWLB.

I will shortly commence section 112 of the Finance Act 2020, amending the National Loans Act 1968 to increase the overall PWLB lending limit from its current level of £95 billion to £115 billion. This will allow the PWLB to make an additional £20 billion of advances to local authorities across England, Scotland, and Wales, continuing to fund essential local projects that will support the delivery of local infrastructure, housing, and service delivery.

The lending limit was previously raised from £85 billion to £95 billion in October 2019. Heightened local authority lending, as highlighted in reports produced by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and National Audit Office (NAO), has driven the need to implement this further increase. The ongoing increase in lending largely reflects local authorities' continued investment in their capital programmes and the expansion of their delivery of services through capital expenditure. The PWLB provides critical support for local authorities through accessible, low-cost lending, and it is important that this access is maintained. I note the action taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to address instances of excessive risk, which will safeguard the proper and proportionate borrowing and investment provided by the PWLB.

The PWLB remains the best source of accessible, low-cost borrowing for local government. By extending the overall lending limit, the Government are strengthening their commitment to supporting local government delivery of key local priorities.

[HCWS13]

## DEFENCE

### Service Complaints Ombudsman: Annual Report 2021

**The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty):** I am pleased to lay before the House today the Service Complaints Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2021 on the fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Service Complaints system.

This report is published by Mariette Hughes and covers the operation of the Service Complaints system and the work of her office in her first year as Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces.

The findings of the report will now be considered fully by the Ministry of Defence, and a formal response to the Ombudsman will follow once that work is complete.

[HCWS7]

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### App Security and Privacy Interventions

**The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure (Julia Lopez):** I am pleased to inform the House that the Government have published a document titled "Call for Views on App Security and Privacy Interventions", which sets out proposed interventions to protect consumers from malicious and poorly developed apps.

App stores can serve as trusted digital marketplaces that help protect users, but this Government expect them to have the right processes to check that apps are not a risk to users' security and privacy. While many app stores have vetting and review processes, malicious and insecure apps continue to make it onto some stores. Developers also have a clear responsibility for ensuring that they are creating apps with appropriate security and privacy. Given the increasingly important role apps play in everyday life, we need to take action to manage the potential risks associated with using apps.

A key ambition of our new national cyber strategy, published in December 2021, is to reduce cyber risks so businesses can maximise the economic benefits of digital technology and citizens are more secure online and confident that their data is protected. The Government's work on app security and privacy will put in place a framework that ensures operators of app stores and developers are taking appropriate steps which mean that users are not put at risk from malicious apps. The national cyber strategy also pledges to secure the next generation of connected technologies, for which apps can often be an important enabler. Additionally, as set out in the plan for digital regulation, we will ensure our overall approach to governing digital technologies is proportionate and supports growth and innovation within the sector.

The interventions suggested in this publication include a voluntary code of practice that sets out baseline security and privacy requirements for app store operators and app developers. The code would be a first step in a series of policy interventions intended to protect consumers from malicious and insecure apps, with the possibility of regulating aspects of the code in the future, should these policy interventions not achieve the desired outcome.

These proposals complement work that is already happening across Government to help protect users and establish a pro-competition regime for digital markets, which will introduce new rules to ensure digital consumers and businesses are treated fairly so that new and innovative tech firms can flourish. As digital markets evolve, such as the distribution and methods for accessing apps, our focus will be to ensure that users are protected and developers are building apps with appropriate levels of security and privacy.

Alongside this publication, we have launched an eight-week call for views process, where we will be welcoming the public's views on the proposed interventions. These views will help shape UK Government policy over the coming years and allow both consumers and businesses to securely use apps as part of everyday life, helping make the UK a stronger and more secure place for people and businesses.

I will place a copy of the "Call for Views on App Security and Privacy Interventions" document in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS3]

### Consultation Response: a New Pro-competition Regime for Digital Markets

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries):** This is a joint statement with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Last week, we published the response to the consultation on a new pro-competition regime for digital markets. As we move to build back better from the pandemic and level up opportunities throughout the UK, unlocking growth in the digital economy has never been more important or urgent.

Digital technologies make an enormous contribution to the UK economy and are positively transforming our daily lives. However, weak competition in digital markets is stifling economic growth and imposing unnecessarily high costs on British businesses and consumers. That is why the Government have committed to establishing a new pro-competition regime for these markets. This will boost competition, drive innovation, and protect those people and businesses that rely on a very small number of immensely powerful tech firms.

Our regime will be able to place obligations on these firms to make it easier for users to communicate across different platforms, switch to smaller providers and deliver new, better alternatives for consumers. The Digital Markets Unit will also introduce clear rules on how the most powerful tech firms should treat businesses and consumers when delivering key services such as social media and online search. These rules will make sure these tech firms are transparent and trade on fair and reasonable terms.

Competition is key to unlocking the full potential of the digital economy as more choice will lower prices for everyday goods and services that rely on online advertising. Countries around the world are developing their policy and regulatory approaches. Now that we have left the EU, we have the freedom to take a bold new approach to regulation in order to ease burdens for businesses, boost competition and help drive a new era of productivity

and prosperity for all the UK's communities and nations. The UK is leading the global debate, as demonstrated during our G7 presidency last year where countries agreed to deepen international co-operation. Last week's publication set out how the new regime will deliver a world-leading, innovation-friendly approach to driving up competition in digital markets.

The set-up of the Digital Markets Unit last year was a major milestone in delivering the regime. We want to maintain this momentum. We set out the design of the regime in our public consultation which closed on 1 October 2021. We received a large number of submissions to our consultation including from trade associations, the tech sector, SMEs, academics, consumers and representative groups. There is strong support for the regime and growing calls for it to be delivered urgently.

This response builds on the consultation and sets out how the regime will work. In particular:

The new pro-competition regime will be overseen and enforced by the Digital Markets Unit (DMU), housed within the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). The regime's core objective will be to promote competition in digital markets for the benefit of consumers, lowering prices and increasing transparency and fairness. The DMU will work closely with other regulators through a statutory duty to consult them where proportionate and relevant.

A small number of the most powerful firms with entrenched and substantial market power that affords them a strategic position in the market will be designated, by the CMA, as having strategic market status and will fall within scope of the regime; these designation parameters, including a minimum revenue threshold, will be outlined in legislation and supported by guidance.

Once designated, firms will be subject to new and binding conduct requirements to manage the effects of their market power by shaping their behaviour and rebalancing the power between big tech and those who rely on them. The regime will give the regulator the ability to tailor these requirements for firms, to account for the most relevant harms and risks. These requirements will be limited by a set of categories set out in legislation. Rules may include giving consumers clear and transparent information on how their data is used, or preventing a firm ranking its own products more highly in a search result where it harms consumers.

The DMU will also proactively tackle the root cause of market power by making targeted and proportionate pro-competitive interventions. These will ensure that businesses across the economy that rely on very powerful tech firms, including the news publishing sector, are treated fairly and can succeed without having to comply with unfair terms. The DMU will have broad discretion to design and implement remedies, including trials, after an evidence-based investigation.

To ensure the regime's effectiveness, the DMU will have robust enforcement powers. This includes the ability to impose financial penalties of up to 10% of a firm's global turnover for breaches. There will also be the option to hold individual senior managers accountable.

The costs of the regime will be partially recouped by levy funding, providing smooth and predictable resourcing for the DMU while ensuring best value for money for the taxpayer.

Finally, designated firms will also be subject to new merger reporting requirements, ensuring greater transparency over their impacts on competition.

2022 is a landmark year for shaping the rules that govern digital technologies around the world. The UK is at the forefront of this, driving forward groundbreaking work, including on online safety, digital competition, data protection, and cybersecurity. Our outcomes-focused and proportionate regulatory approach will be tailored to maximise benefits to the UK economy.

The new pro-competition regime also complements the BEIS-led "Reforming Consumer and Competition Policy" consultation, which considered broader competition reforms and made a number of proposals which will also help to improve competition in markets more widely and fair treatment of consumers in digital markets. The response to this consultation was published in April.

The CMA and Ofcom last week published advice on how the regime would govern the relationship between platforms and content providers including news publishers. The DMU must be able to intervene to ensure fair and reasonable contractual terms, and we are considering the use of binding final offer arbitration as a backstop enforcement mechanism to resolve disputes where needed.

I will be placing copies of the response in the Libraries of both Houses, and it is also available on gov.uk.

[HCWS5]

## EDUCATION

### Level 3 Qualifications Review

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Alex Burghart):** Today I am announcing the next stage of the Government's reforms to post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England—the publication of the provisional list of qualifications that overlap with waves 1 and 2 T-levels. We debated these reforms to level 3 as part of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act, and I am happy to provide an update on the next phase of implementation.

This is a vital component of our reforms to technical education. Transforming post-16 education and skills is at the heart of our plan to build back better and level up the country by ensuring that students everywhere have access to qualifications that will give them the skills to succeed. Now more than ever, it is vital that the qualifications on offer meet the needs of employers and support more people into higher-skilled, higher-wage jobs.

The keystone of the reforms is the introduction of quality technical qualifications such as T-levels. These are designed by employers to give young people the skills they need to progress into skilled employment, or to go on to further study including higher education. The breadth and depth of T-levels is unmatched giving students a thorough understanding of the sector and skills needed to work in specific occupations, all backed and designed by employers.

We are providing a variety of support to the sector to ensure that providers are able to deliver successfully, including over £400 million capital funding for new facilities and industry standard equipment, and free learning and development for all T Level teachers that has benefited over 8,500 individuals.

The rigour of T-levels, combined with the meaningful industry placement of at least 45 days in a genuine workplace, will equip more young people with the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to access skilled employment or further technical study. T-levels are being scaled up at pace throughout the country, currently offered at over 100 providers, with over 6,000 learners across the country, and there are around 400 providers who are planning to deliver T-levels from 2023. We have invested £200 million over the past four years to help providers build their capacity and networks with employers to deliver high-quality placements.

But these essential reforms will only have their full benefit if we simultaneously address the complexities and variable quality of the broader qualifications system. We want every student to have confidence that every qualification on offer is high quality, and to be able to easily understand what skills and knowledge that qualification will provide and where it will take them. These changes are part of our long-term reforms to technical education, building on the recommendations in the Sainsbury report, published in 2016, itself building on the findings of the Wolf review of 2011.

In August 2021 the Government confirmed that they would remove funding approval for more than 5,000 qualifications at level 3 and below that had no or low enrolments. Funding approval for these qualifications will be removed later this year, streamlining the qualifications landscape.

The next phase of our reforms is to remove funding for qualifications that overlap with T-levels, which will give T-levels the space needed to flourish and reduce complexity for learners and employers. That is why today we are publishing a provisional list of 160 qualifications that overlap with waves 1 and 2 T-levels. Subject to the outcomes of the appeals process, we will withdraw funding approval at 16 to 19 from these qualifications from August 2024 as part of our reforms to improve the quality of post-16 qualifications. This provisional list is only a small proportion of the qualifications available at level 3, and as announced by the Secretary of State in November 2021, funding will be withdrawn one year later than originally planned, to allow additional time for the sector to prepare.

This review has been led by evidence. We commissioned independent assessors to conduct in depth reviews of the qualifications. All qualifications placed on the provisional overlap list were rigorously assessed and considered against three tests:

That they are technical qualifications

That they have demonstrable overlap of content and outcomes with wave 1 and wave 2 T-levels already on offer

That they are aimed at supporting entry to the same occupation(s) as those T-levels.

Only those qualifications which meet all three of these tests were included on the list, to ensure that we do not leave gaps in provision. We also excluded qualifications where they were aimed at supporting entry to occupations covered by wave 3 and 4 T-levels, since these are not yet on offer; or where they were primarily aimed at people already in work.

As the post-16 qualifications review continues, we will assess the quality of qualifications that we continue to fund alongside A-levels and T-levels. We are clear that other qualifications, including BTECs and similar qualifications, will continue to play an important role. We will continue to fund these qualifications where they are high quality and where there is a clear need for them.

Both Ofqual and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will have a role in approving these qualifications. This phase will see the most significant changes to the level 3 landscape, when reformed qualifications are approved from 2025. Ofqual have recently consulted on their approach to regulating these qualifications, and both Ofqual and the institute will consult further ahead of the criteria being published

later this year. We have published guidance today setting out the timeline for this. In autumn 2022, we will publish details of the process which awarding organisations will need to follow for every qualification to be approved for funding, including details of the quality and other criteria. In the future, all qualifications at level 3 and below will need to meet these criteria to ensure that they are high quality.

Awarding organisations with qualifications on the list have been notified, as have the Federation of Awarding Bodies and Joint Council for Qualifications, and all further education providers. We have also published appeals guidance, and awarding organisations have until Friday 8 July to appeal these overlap assessments. We will confirm the final list in September after the appeals process has been completed.

[HCWS15]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Public Order Bill

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel):** The right to protest peacefully, for people to exercise their rights to freedom of speech and assembly, is a cornerstone of our democratic values and will always be defended by this Government. However, the rights of protesters must be balanced with the rights of the general public to go about their daily lives free from serious disruption or harm. In recent months, we have seen a minority of protestors using guerrilla tactics that cause misery to the hard-working public, disrupt businesses, interfere with emergency services, cost millions in taxpayers' money, divert the police from tackling crime and put lives at risk.

The Public Order Bill, introduced in the House of Commons today, builds on the public order measures in part 3 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 which, among other things, updates the powers in the Public Order Act 1986 enabling the police to impose conditions on a protest, provides for a statutory offence of intentionally or recklessly causing public nuisance and increases the maximum penalty for the offence of wilful obstruction of a highway. The Government had originally sought to include the majority of the new measures announced today in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, but the Government's amendments to that Bill were blocked by the House of Lords. Since then, we have seen the Just Stop Oil protests which threatened fuel shortages across the country.

The Public Order Bill includes the following measures:

*Offences related to locking on*—creating two new offences designed to deter individuals from “locking on” and “going equipped to lock on”. Locking-on is the tactic in which protesters attach themselves to other individuals, objects or land, or attach objects together or to land, creating an obstruction which is capable of causing serious disruption and is difficult and time consuming for the police to remove.

*Obstruction of major transport works*—creating a new offence of obstructing the construction or maintenance of major transport works

*Interference with key national infrastructure*—creating a new offence which covers any behaviour which prevents or significantly delays the use or operation of key infrastructure, such as roads, railways, airports, oil refineries (which we have seen an increase of in the last few months), gas installations, power plants and printing presses.



*Powers to stop and search*—extending existing stop and search powers to allow the police to search and seize objects made, adapted, or intended for use in the course of specified protest-related offences (including the new offences listed above). There will be both a suspicion-led power, amending section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, and a suspicion-less power, based on section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

*Serious disruption prevention orders*—introducing a new preventative court order—the serious disruption prevention order (SDPO), aimed at tackling repeated highly disruptive behaviour by prolific protestors. The new Bill now includes provision for the electronic tagging of persons subject to an SDPO.

*Power of chief officers of police to delegate certain functions under the Public Order Act 1986*—equalising the seniority of police officer in London who may attach conditions to an upcoming protest or prohibit a trespassory assembly to match that applicable in forces outside of London. The current minimum rank of assistant commissioner will be changed to that of commander, which is equivalent to assistant chief constables outside of London. This is a new measure included in this Bill.

To support the parliamentary scrutiny of the Bill, I am publishing the following documents on gov.uk:

- Impact assessment;
- Policy equality statement;
- Delegated powers memorandum;
- ECHR memorandum; and
- Fact sheet.

[HCWS12]

## Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster):** The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) is today laying before the House a statement of changes in immigration rules.

The changes reflect amendments required as a result of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, to implement the reformed asylum system.

Significantly, we will introduce a differentiated asylum system as provided for by Section 12 of the 2022 Act. In order to do this, we will also introduce three new types of permission to stay where a person is granted on a protection route:

- refugee permission to stay for group 1 refugees;
- temporary refugee permission to stay for group 2 refugees;
- and
- temporary humanitarian permission to stay for recipients of humanitarian protection

Different entitlements, in terms of period of grant, conditions of stay and access to family reunion, will be provided to refugees who did not come directly to the UK, did not claim asylum without delay or, in some cases, have not shown good cause for any illegal entry or presence in the UK. This supports our key principle of deterring dangerous journeys and encouraging asylum claims to be made in the first safe country an asylum seeker reaches: this is the fastest route to safety.

The current immigration rules do not define a “claim for humanitarian protection”, therefore we will clearly outline the Government’s definition of such a claim. Furthermore, some of the changes to humanitarian

protection in the rules are necessary for the effective operation of the migration and economic development partnership with Rwanda in preventing unnecessary delays to removal. Currently, individuals may make a humanitarian protection claim against country of return (which under the definition would include Rwanda), that would require an assessment of whether the individual is a refugee. This runs counter to the object and purpose of the partnership, where responsibility for refugee status determination is transferred to Rwanda. We intend to clarify that a claim for humanitarian protection can only be made against country of origin (as is the case with asylum claims). The change does not prevent individuals from raising safety concerns about their removal and the specific circumstances of any individual will be considered before removal to ensure the removal is safe and meets the UK’s legal obligations, including under the ECHR. These changes will be made from 11 May 2022. This is necessary and proportionate in order to provide clarity to applicants on the circumstances in which they can lodge a claim for humanitarian protection and to prevent unnecessary delays to removal under the UK-Rwanda partnership. Given the anticipated deterrent effect of the partnership on people smuggling, this will help to quickly reduce the number of dangerous journeys and save lives.

We will also introduce a provision to clarify the exceptional circumstances that may warrant a grant of permission to enter or stay in the UK for children seeking to join a refugee parent or relative. This change will help create more fairness, transparency, and consistency in decision making.

In addition, new immigration rules will come into effect which impose a visa regime on nationals of El Salvador.

Salvadoran nationals wishing to visit the UK will be required to obtain a visit visa from 11 May 2022. There will be a transition period: Salvadoran nationals who have pre-booked travel before 16:00 BST on 11 May, and will arrive in the UK before 8 June, will still be able to enter the UK without a visa. Any passengers with pre-booked travel arriving in the UK after 8 June and those who did not book travel before 16:00 on 11 May, will still require a visa to enter the UK.

This decision has been taken by Ministers across Government in light of increasing asylum claims from Salvadoran nationals in UK ports in recent years. There were 38 asylum claims made by Salvadoran nationals in 2017. This figure has sharply increased by 1,750% to reach 703 in 2021.

Due to public policy reasons, the UK Government unilaterally suspended the existing visa treaty (1962) between the UK and El Salvador and will implement the immigration rules changes to impose the visa requirement immediately at 16:00 on 11 May.

Finally, eligible nationals from Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, will have access to the electronic visa waiver scheme. Nationals of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia will be able to visit the UK for up to six months for tourism, business, study or medical treatment. This brings the status of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in line with Oman, UAE, Qatar and Kuwait who already benefit from the electronic visa waiver scheme. There is no requirement for applicants to provide biometrics, attend a visa application centre or hand in passports in advance of travel for an EVW as there is with visas. An EVW allows the holder

to travel to the UK once and costs £30. Applicants only need to provide their travel details for pre-clearance 48 hours in advance of travel.

Visit visas are an important part of securing the UK's border and are an effective tool for the UK in reducing illegal immigration, tackling organised crime and protecting national security. The UK keeps its visa system under regular review. Decisions on changes are always taken in the round and reflect a range of factors. These will vary globally, but often include security, compliance, returns and prosperity.

The necessary changes to the immigration rules are being laid on 11 May 2022. For the changes regarding El Salvador, due to safeguarding the operation of the national immigration system, those changes will come into effect on 11 May 2022. The necessary changes to allow Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to access EVW come into effect on 1 June 2022. Given the anticipated deterrent effect of the partnership on people smuggling, and the need to quickly reduce the number of dangerous journeys and save lives, those changes to humanitarian protection claims necessary for the effective operation of the migration and economic development partnership with Rwanda in preventing unnecessary delays to removal will come into effect on 11 May 2022. The wider asylum changes come into effect on 28 June 2022.

[HCWS10]

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### Prime Minister's Trade Envoy Programme

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mike Freer):** The Prime Minister has made a new appointment to his Trade Envoy programme. The new appointment is:

The right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), has been appointed as Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Japan.

The new appointment will extend the total number of Trade Envoys to 37 parliamentarians, covering 77 markets. The role as a Prime Minister's Trade Envoy is unpaid and voluntary with cross-party membership from both Houses. The broad role supports the UK's ambitious trade and investment agenda by championing Global Britain and promoting the UK as a destination of choice for inward investment. They also support the UK's economic recovery through the levelling up agenda, by helping business take advantage of the opportunities arising in export markets.

[HCWS4]

### Russia: Trade Sanctions

**The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** On May 9 2022, the Department for International Trade and HM Treasury announced a fresh package of trade sanctions targeting £1.7 billion worth of trade with Russia.

These measures, bringing the total value of products subjected to full or partial trade sanctions to over £4 billion, are designed to thwart Putin's aims in Ukraine and undermine his illegal invasion.

The import tariffs announced today will target £1.4 billion worth of goods imported from Russia, including certain metals such as platinum, chemicals and plastics to put further pressure on Putin and his illegal invasion of

Ukraine. Further detail on the products impacted by these new measures can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-punishes-putin-with-new-round-of-sanctions-on-17-billion-of-goods>.

New export bans will target over £250 million worth of trade in the sectors of the Russian economy most dependent on UK goods the hardest, including certain chemicals, materials—such as plastics, rubbers, textiles, base metals and wood products, machinery, precision instruments, and electrical products. These bans will target Russia's manufacturing and heavy machinery sectors, effectively contributing to the debilitation of the Putin war machine. Further detail on the products impacted by these new measures will be shared in June.

This is the third wave of trade sanctions announced by the UK Government and, excluding gold and energy, will bring the proportion of goods imports from Russia hit by restrictions to over 96%, with over 60% of goods exports to Russia under whole or partial restrictions. Legislation will be laid in due course to implement these measures. The UK Government will continue to consider additional measures to further weaken Putin's war effort. I encourage all importers that use Russian imports to source alternative supplies. As with all sanctions, these measures will be kept under review.

[HCWS2]

## LEADER OF THE HOUSE

### The Government's Legislative Programme 2022

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mark Spencer):** Following the state opening of Parliament, and for the convenience of the House, I am listing the Bills that were announced:

Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill  
 Bill of Rights  
 Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions Bill  
 Brexit Freedoms Bill  
 Conversion Therapy Bill  
 Data Reform Bill  
 Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill  
 Energy Security Bill  
 Financial Services and Markets Bill  
 Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill  
 Harbours (Seafarers' Remuneration) Bill  
 High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill  
 Higher Education Bill  
 Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill  
 Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Bill  
 Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill  
 Media Bill  
 Modern Slavery Bill  
 National Security Bill  
 Non-Domestic Ratings Bill  
 Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill  
 Online Safety Bill Procurement Bill  
 Products Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill  
 Public Order Bill  
 Renters Reform Bill Schools Bill  
 Social Housing Regulation Bill  
 Social Security (Special Rules for End of Life) Bill  
 Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill  
 Transport Bill  
 UK Infrastructure Bank Bill

The programme will also include Finance Bills to implement budget policy decisions. This list does not include draft Bills or Law Commission Bills.

Detailed information about each of these Bills can be accessed from the gov.uk website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/queens-speech-2022-background-briefing-notes>.

[HCWS6]

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Northern Ireland Assembly Election

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis):** Last Thursday, the people of Northern Ireland went to the polls to choose their elected representatives. The results of that election were confirmed on Sunday 8 May 2022.

I want to offer my congratulations to all those who were elected and encourage the parties to form an Executive as soon as possible. The people of Northern Ireland deserve a stable and accountable devolved Government that delivers on the issues that matter most to them.

Earlier this year, the Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Act passed through Parliament. That legislation provides for a period of up to 24 weeks after an election for Northern Ireland's political representatives to restore the devolved institutions. During this time, Northern Ireland Ministers in post before the election who were re-elected can remain as Ministers to support the delivery of public services.

I met with the leaders of the five largest parties in Northern Ireland on Monday 9 May and urged them to restore a fully functioning Executive and Assembly at the earliest possible moment, starting with the nomination of an Assembly Speaker. An Executive will only be formed if Sinn Féin nominates a First Minister and if the DUP nominates a deputy First Minister. The two roles are joint and equal, with neither office holder able to exercise functions or make decisions without the other.

The Northern Ireland protocol remains a barrier to stability in Northern Ireland and the Government will do whatever it takes to protect the Belfast (Good Friday) agreement in all its dimensions. We are clear that the protocol does not have the support of many in the Unionist community and is not working for many people and businesses in Northern Ireland. We have to address the outstanding issues and we want to do that by agreement with the EU, but as we have always made clear we will not shy away from taking unilateral action if necessary.

Furthermore, while Unionism is set to remain the largest designation in the Northern Ireland Assembly with 37 seats, followed by Nationalism on 35 seats, parties which designate as neither will now constitute 20% of the Assembly. This is a significant development in Northern Irish politics and its implications are the subject of growing discussion and debate.

Together, we must move forward towards a brighter future. That means a strong, functioning Executive delivering for all the people of Northern Ireland. My priority is to provide the space for an agreement to be reached.

[HCWS14]

## The Government's Legislative Programme (Northern Ireland) 2022-23

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis):** The legislative programme for the third Session was outlined at the state opening of Parliament on Tuesday 10 May. This statement provides a summary of the programme and its application to Northern Ireland. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills or finance Bills.

This ambitious legislative programme underlines the importance that the Government place on the Union and Northern Ireland's integral part within it. It reinforces the Government commitment to grow the economy across the UK to help address the cost of living and create the conditions for more high-wage, high-skill jobs, delivering for people and businesses across Northern Ireland, as part of a strong United Kingdom.

It also builds on the unprecedented action the Government have taken to support individuals, businesses and communities to get the Northern Ireland economy back up and running. The Government are providing historic levels of funding for the Northern Ireland Executive which will receive on average £15 billion per year over the spending review period. This marks the largest funding settlement for Northern Ireland since devolution in 1998. The Executive will also receive an additional £47 million as a result of measures announced in the spring statement. The Executive can spend this funding as they see fit in devolved areas to benefit people in Northern Ireland.

The Government are also investing an additional £3.5 billion in Northern Ireland through the city and growth deal programme, the new deal for Northern Ireland, Peace Plus and the New Decade, New Approach financial package.

This financial boost, together with further funding streams and legislative action, will continue to lay the foundations for delivering prosperity, safety, ongoing support for communities right across Northern Ireland, and working with the Executive to ensure the effective delivery of public services.

My Department will also lead on two of the Bills within the legislative programme which have a specific focus on matters at the heart of Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill will address the legacy of Northern Ireland's past by providing better outcomes for victims, survivors and their families, giving veterans the protections they deserve and focusing on information recovery and reconciliation.

The Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Bill will deliver a carefully balanced package of identity and language measures as negotiated by the Northern Ireland parties under the New Decade, New Approach deal.

I will also shortly return to Parliament and lay regulations that will place a duty on the Northern Ireland Department of Health to make abortion services available as soon as is reasonably practicable: remove the need for Executive Committee approval before services can be commissioned and funded; and confer on me the power to do anything that a Northern Ireland Minister or Department could do to ensure that abortion services are provided in Northern Ireland to the standard decided by Parliament in 2019.

The Bills that will extend, in whole or in part, to Northern Ireland are listed below:

Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill  
 Bill of Rights  
 Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions Bill  
 Brexit Freedoms Bill  
 Data Reform Bill  
 Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill  
 Energy Security Bill  
 Financial Services and Markets Bill  
 Harbours (Seafarers' Remuneration) Bill  
 Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Bill  
 Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill  
 Media Bill  
 Modern Slavery Bill  
 National Security Bill  
 Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill  
 Online Safety Bill  
 Procurement Bill  
 Products Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill  
 Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill  
 Transport Bill  
 UK Infrastructure Bank Bill

In line with the Sewel Convention and associated practices, the Government will continue to work constructively with Northern Ireland Executive Ministers to secure the legislative consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly where achievable and appropriate.

[HCWS59]

## SCOTLAND

### The Government's Legislative Programme (Scotland) 2022-23

#### The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack):

The legislative programme for the third Session was outlined at the State Opening of Parliament on Tuesday 10 May. This statement provides a summary of the programme and its application to Scotland. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills or Finance Bills.

The UK Government will continue to deliver for people and businesses across Scotland, as part of a strong United Kingdom. The Government's legislative programme for this Session will boost economic growth across the UK to address the cost of living, helping to create the conditions for more people to have high-wage, high-skill jobs. We will continue to build our recovery from the pandemic, and work to make our country safer.

When we work collaboratively as one United Kingdom we are safer, stronger, more prosperous, and better able to tackle our shared challenges. That is why the UK Government announced the first allocations for many of our UK-wide growth funds, including more than £171 million for eight projects to improve infrastructure in Scotland as part of the levelling up fund and over £1 million for six projects through the community ownership fund to save community assets at risk of being lost, such as the Old Forge pub in the Highlands. In addition, we announced that 56 projects in Scotland would receive a share of more than £18 million through the community

renewal fund. The Glasgow city region will become one of three new "innovation accelerators" which will drive-up prosperity and opportunity for local people and backed by a share of £100 million of UK Government funding. A new, £150 million British Business Bank fund in Scotland will support firms, and the Scottish Government are being provided with £1.9 billion for farmers and land managers and £42.2 million to support fisheries over the current spending review period.

To spread economic opportunities more evenly across the UK, Scotland will benefit from the UK shared prosperity fund, with over £212 million provided to level up communities across Scotland over this spending review period. Amongst other things, this includes the multiply programme which will give thousands of adults across the UK the opportunity to develop functional numeracy skills. The new £1.4 billion global Britain investment fund will spread economic opportunities more evenly across the UK by supporting investment in industries including life sciences, offshore wind, and manufacturing.

We are bringing two green freeports to Scotland to support economic growth. These will play a key role in supporting the regeneration of communities, bringing jobs and prosperity. They will also turbo-charge our commitments on net zero and support work to level-up the whole of the United Kingdom.

This is on top of the UK Government's investment of almost £1.5 billion in Scottish city and region growth deals. Funding was accelerated in seven of these in Scotland to drive forward local economic priorities in Tay cities, Borderlands, Moray and the Scottish Islands (announced in the 2020 spending review), and Ayrshire, Argyll and Bute, and Falkirk (announced in the March 2021 Budget).

The Government are committed to protecting and promoting the strengths of the United Kingdom, building on hundreds of years of partnership between the different parts of our country, the most successful political and economic union in history and the foundation upon which all our businesses and citizens are able to thrive and prosper.

The following Bills will extend and apply to Scotland (either in full or in part):

- Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill
- Bill of Rights
- Boycotts, Divestments, and Sanctions Bill
- Brexit Freedoms Bill
- Data Reform Bill
- Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill
- Energy Security Bill
- Financial Services and Markets Bill
- Harbours (Seafarers' Remuneration) Bill
- High Speed Rail (Crewe-Manchester) Bill
- Infrastructure Bank Bill
- Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill
- Media Bill
- Modern Slavery Bill
- National Security Bill
- Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill
- Online Safety Bill
- Procurement Bill

- Products Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill
- Social Housing Regulation Bill
- Social Security (Special Rules for End of Life) Bill
- Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill
- Transport Bill

The Government continue to deliver for Scotland and will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to secure the legislative consent of the Scottish Parliament where appropriate.

[HCWS11]

## WALES

### The Government's Legislative Programme (Wales) 2022-23

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Simon Hart):** The legislative programme for the third session was outlined at the state opening of Parliament on Tuesday 10 May. This statement provides a summary of the programme and its application to Wales. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills or finance Bills.

People in Wales have benefited from our UK-wide £400 billion package of support during the pandemic which has protected over 470,000 jobs in Wales. The UK Government are also providing a record £18 billion per year on average to the Welsh Government through the Barnett formula during the current spending review period, which amounts to the largest block grant settlement for Wales since devolution and an annual increase of £2.5 billion. The Welsh Government are able to spend this funding in line with their priorities in devolved areas.

This Government will continue to deliver for people and businesses across Wales, as part of a strong United Kingdom. In the first allocations of our UK-wide growth funds, Wales received £121 million for 10 projects to improve infrastructure in Wales as part of the levelling up fund, over £460,000 for 3 projects through the community ownership fund to save community assets at risk of being lost, and over £46 million for 165 projects in Wales through the UK community renewal fund.

Looking ahead, communities in Wales will receive £585 million through the UK shared prosperity fund. This will help to spread opportunity, increase prosperity and level up every corner of the UK. This funding includes over £101 million for Wales for an adult numeracy programme, Multiply, which will support people to develop their numeracy skills.

This is on top of the UK Government's investment of over £790 million in the four city and growth deals in Wales. At autumn Budget, funding was accelerated for the Cardiff City region deal to fast-track projects that range from innovation and fintech, to manufacturing and infrastructure.

We are emerging from the worst public health crisis in over a century and this Government's focus will be on boosting economic growth across the UK to address the cost of living, helping to create the conditions for more people to have high-wage, high-skill jobs; backing the police to make the streets safer and supporting the NHS to clear the covid backlogs. By focusing on these priorities our legislative programme will directly contribute to levelling up and spreading opportunity across the whole of the United Kingdom.

The following Bills will extend and apply to Wales, either in full or in part:

- Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill
- Bill of Rights
- Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions Bill
- Brexit Freedoms Bill
- Conversion Therapy Bill
- Data Reform Bill
- Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill
- Energy Security Bill
- Financial Services and Markets Bill
- Harbours (Seafarers' Remuneration) Bill
- Higher Education Bill
- Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill
- Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill
- Media Bill
- Modern Slavery Bill
- National Security Bill
- Non-Domestic Ratings Bill
- Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill
- Online Safety Bill
- Procurement Bill
- Products Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill
- Public Order Bill
- Social Housing Regulation Bill
- Social Security (Special Rules for End of Life) Bill
- Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill
- Transport Bill
- UK Infrastructure Bank Bill

The Government take their responsibilities in Wales seriously and will continue to work constructively with the Welsh Government to secure the legislative consent of the Senedd Cymru where appropriate.

[HCWS58]



# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 11 May 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY</b> .....	1WS	<b>INTERNATIONAL TRADE—continued</b>	
Low-income Workers: Exclusivity Clauses.....	1WS	Russia: Trade Sanctions .....	11WS
<b>DEFENCE</b> .....	3WS	<b>LEADER OF THE HOUSE</b> .....	12WS
Service Complaints Ombudsman: Annual Report		The Government’s Legislative Programme 2022 ....	12WS
2021 .....	3WS	<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b> .....	13WS
<b>DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT</b> .....	3WS	Northern Ireland Assembly Election.....	13WS
App Security and Privacy Interventions.....	3WS	The Government’s Legislative Programme	
Consultation Response: a New Pro-competition		(Northern Ireland) 2022-23.....	14WS
Regime for Digital Markets .....	4WS	<b>SCOTLAND</b> .....	15WS
<b>EDUCATION</b> .....	6WS	The Government’s Legislative Programme	
Level 3 Qualifications Review .....	6WS	(Scotland) 2022-23).....	15WS
<b>HOME DEPARTMENT</b> .....	8WS	<b>TREASURY</b> .....	2WS
Public Order Bill .....	8WS	Public Works Loan Board Lending Limit .....	2WS
Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules.....	9WS	<b>WALES</b> .....	17WS
<b>INTERNATIONAL TRADE</b> .....	11WS	The Government’s Legislative Programme	
Prime Minister’s Trade Envoy Programme.....	11WS	(Wales) 2022-23.....	17WS

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**not later than  
Wednesday 18 May 2022**

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**CONTENTS**

**Wednesday 11 May 2022**

**Speaker's Statement [Col. 131]**

**Ukraine: UK Military Support [Col. 132]**  
*Answer to urgent question—(Leo Docherty)*

**Jim Fitton: Detention in Iraq [Col. 141]**  
*Statement—(James Cleverly)*

**Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) [Col. 147]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First and Second time*

**Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) [Col. 147]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First and Second time*

**Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure [Col. 147]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First and Second time*

**Online Safety [Col. 148]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First and Second time*

**High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) [Col. 148]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Levelling-up and Regeneration [Col. 148]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**National Security [Col. 148]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Public Order [Col. 149]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Trade (Australia and New Zealand) [Col. 149]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Debate on the Address [Col. 150]**  
*Debate adjourned*

**UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Rural Areas [Col. 253]**  
*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Written Statements [Col. 1WS]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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