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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 16 May 2022

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Town Centre Regeneration

1. **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What steps he is taking to support local leaders in regenerating high streets and town centres. [900015]

20. **Kate Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help support the regeneration of towns and high streets. [900037]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Neil O'Brien): Regenerating our high streets and town centres is essential to the Government's commitment to levelling up the country. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill includes measures to tackle vacant properties, improve compulsory purchase powers and make temporary pavement licensing permanent. It builds on the comprehensive funding package already announced, including the £3.6 billion towns and future high streets funds, the £4.8 billion levelling-up fund and the recently launched £2.6 billion shared prosperity fund.

Jack Brereton: I thank the Minister and the whole Cabinet for visiting Stoke-on-Trent last week. In towns across Stoke-on-Trent, encouraging new uses of property on our high streets has often been held back by complex ownership and the council not having the resources to tackle the issues. What more are the Government doing both to incentivise property owners to bring derelict spaces back into use and to make it easier to use enforcement powers where owners prove unwilling to do so?

Neil O'Brien: My hon. Friend is completely correct. It was a pleasure to join the Cabinet meeting in Stoke last week and talk about how we drive forward regeneration there. Stoke is really powering ahead, and the measures in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill—particularly those to reform compulsory purchase orders and crack down on empty shops—will help things go even faster. That is in addition to the specialised support that Stoke-on-Trent is receiving through the high streets task force. I have also set up a meeting next month with all the infrastructure and regeneration bodies across Government to plan how we can build on Stoke's three levelling-up fund successes.

Kate Griffiths: Burton town deal board has worked hard over the past two years in putting together a town deal we can be proud of. It is clear that constituents are passionate about our town, and they have worked with the board to ensure that the final plan will offer a great future for Burton. The plan has now been submitted. Can my hon. Friend offer any thoughts on Burton's plans, and can he give an indication of when approval might be granted so that we can crack on with levelling up in our area?

Neil O'Brien: I praise the proactive approach that East Staffordshire Borough Council has taken, which includes working cross-party to build consensus. Its plans for the riverside regeneration in particular will be absolutely transformative. The business case documents are currently being reviewed by officials, and I hope to be able to sign those off shortly so that the projects can get under way.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Rhondda is absolutely beautiful, but some of our town centres are let down by hideous old buildings which, frankly, do not need any levelling up; they need some levelling down. So will the Minister please put in place a levelling-down fund that will allow us to destroy some buildings, such as the bingo hall in Hannah Street in Porth?

Neil O'Brien: At the same time as making an amusing point, the hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. The powers for compulsory purchase will help to unlock sites, including sites that the hon. Gentleman mentions which need fundamental change. The funding schemes we have put in place—the shared prosperity fund and so on—will help put financial firepower behind those regeneration schemes, too.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): One way to regenerate high streets is to repurpose old retail units as co-working spaces, and increasing the number of remote jobs available means people do not have to leave the place they love for the job they want. Would the Minister, and indeed any Member across the House, like to come to my Work Hull: Work Happy event on 23 June at 11 am to find out more about the benefits of remote working for productivity and opportunity?

Neil O'Brien: It sounds extremely interesting, and I would be very interested in coming along. The hon. Lady is completely correct that remote working is potentially a really powerful driver for levelling up, and some of the measures in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, such as repurposing shops through the high street rental auction scheme, can potentially be really transformative for our high streets.

Building Remediation Costs

2. **Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that leaseholders do not have to pay for remediation work in buildings where the developer is at fault. [900016]

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (Michael Gove): The Building Safety Act 2022 protects leaseholders from costs associated with historical building safety defects. Qualifying leaseholders and buildings of

above 11 metres in height are fully protected from unsafe cladding remediation costs. There are also robust and far-reaching protections from non-cladding costs, with leaseholder contributions being a last resort and firmly capped. Where a freeholder is linked to the original developer, leaseholders will now pay nothing.

Kelly Tolhurst: Leaseholders in my constituency have been pleased with the progress that has been made through the Building Safety Act. However, it is disappointing that some developers are yet to sign up to the building safety pledge. Could my right hon. Friend outline what support is in place for leaseholders in buildings of over 11 metres who find themselves in that situation?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that particular question. Some 45 of the biggest 53 developers have so far signed the pledge to remediate buildings for which they are responsible. However, I know there are developments in my hon. Friend's constituency where the developers are not among those who have signed up yet. We will be moving developer by developer and owner by owner to ensure that those responsible relieve leaseholders of their obligations, and I will stay closely in touch with my hon. Friend as we make progress.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): We have all had cases where a developer who is at fault closes down on a Friday evening and then reopens on the Monday morning under a different name, as that avoids any kind of sanction or prosecution. Will the Secretary of State look at allowing the prosecution of individual directors only in those extreme cases of deeply questionable developers?

Michael Gove: Yes, absolutely.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): My right hon. Friend has done excellent work on protecting leaseholders over the cladding scandal as a result of revisiting Government policy. Will he revisit another Government policy that affects leaseholders badly: the encouragement of building new floors on top of existing apartment blocks? Having experienced this disaster myself, I know only too well how shoddy workmanship then leaves leaseholders picking up the bills for a development that they did not want and they had to endure for months on end.

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend has, with his characteristic assiduity, already raised this question with me both formally and informally, and I appreciate the unfortunate consequences that some have to face, but we obviously need to balance protecting the rights of leaseholders with ensuring that, through the proper application of permitted development rights we can in a sensitive way increase accommodation and make sure that we have a process, particularly in urban areas, that allows us to provide more homes without encroaching on valuable green land. As ever, however, we need to keep under appropriate supervision the use of permitted development rights, and the case my right hon. Friend raises will be one that weighs on my thinking.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that an associated problem for many leaseholders is the very high cost of insurance premiums; that affects many of my constituents in Cambridge. What is he doing to address that?

Michael Gove: My noble Friend Lord Greenhalgh, Minister for building safety and for fire safety, has been in conversation with the Association of British Insurers, and Baroness Morgan of Cotes has been discussing with him exactly how we might move to a happier situation. I hope to be talking to both insurers and mortgage lenders in the next few weeks in order to move the landscape forward.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I greatly welcome the legislation that will protect leaseholders when developers are at fault, but what happens if a developer undertakes work, such as cladding, which at the time met building regulations but subsequently has been shown to be unsafe? Who gets protection then?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend raises an important question, and here I have an opportunity to thank those developers, as well as the House Builders Federation, who have acknowledged that they were part of a regulatory system and that even those who sought to do the right thing were on occasions required to accept an ethic of shared responsibility; they have accepted it and for that reason leaseholders, who have no responsibility and no blame to shoulder, are protected.

Shared Prosperity Fund

3. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with elected members in the devolved Administrations on the (a) equity and (b) transparency of the UK shared prosperity fund. [900017]

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (**Michael Gove**): The United Kingdom Government have engaged with each of the devolved Administrations on the design of the UK shared prosperity fund both at official and ministerial levels, and our engagement with Ministers from the devolved Administrations in the weeks leading up to the publication of the UKSPF allocation helped to inform the most appropriate mix of interventions and specifically the allocations for each nation.

Peter Grant: No doubt one thing that will have been raised in those discussions is the fact that this year Scotland's share will be £151 million less than we would have got in EU structural funds had we not been dragged out of the EU against our will, despite the fact that both the Tory party manifesto in 2019 and a personal pledge from the Secretary of State at the Holyrood Finance and Public Administration Committee earlier this year assured us we would get at least as much as would have come from the European Union. Why have those two promises been broken, and, most importantly, what has happened to Scotland's missing £151 million?

Michael Gove: The normally pertinacious Member is misinformed: it is the case that Scotland receives just as much. I fear he is probably missing out the money Scotland receives from the European Union as a result of money we gave to the EU, and as funding slowly moves down, the great thing about leaving the EU is that we have control of how these funds are spent; we can decide how they are spent. If the hon. Member wants to take us back into the European Union perhaps

he will explain to voters in Scotland why he wants to take us back into the common fisheries policy, why he wants to abandon the trade deals we have secured that benefit Scotland's distillers and farmers, and why he wants power to be exercised by unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels rather than elected representatives here.

Planning Policy Reform

4. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reform planning policy. [900018]

8. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to give residents greater input on local developments. [900022]

17. **David Johnston** (Wantage) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to give residents greater input on local developments. [900034]

The Minister for Housing (Stuart Andrew): The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will improve our planning system and give residents more involvement in local development. The Bill will strengthen and scale up neighbourhood planning and enable the piloting of street votes supported by new digital tools to give communities more say in the developments that affect them.

Huw Merriman: The 2020 White Paper promised us a once-in-a-generation reform to planning policy. The present proposals appear somewhat unambitious and modest in contrast. Can I meet the Minister so he can explain to me how we can deal with the following situation in my constituency? Wealden and Rother District Councils have issued 10,000 planning permissions that have not been built out, and yet they still have to deliver 2,000 new homes between them each year. The developers responsible for building the homes deliver only 1,000 new homes. Surely, at the very least, we can have annual housing targets that take into account houses that are not yet built out, so that developers build rather than land bank.

Stuart Andrew: I am more than happy to meet my hon. Friend. There are measures in the Bill to try to address build-out rates, which are an important element that we have to tackle. Under the Bill, it will be necessary to supply the local authority with a commencement notice, an agreement on the number of houses that will be built each year and a completion notice. We are absolutely on this, and I assure my hon. Friend that we will do everything we can to ensure that the houses that have got permission are built.

Henry Smith: I welcome the Government's reform of the planning system, but Homes England proposes the development of up to 10,000 houses on flood-prone green fields to the west of Ifield, just outside my constituency. That will put unacceptable pressure on local infrastructure, and although local people in my constituency will be most affected, they have no say over it. How will these planning proposals allow the people of Crawley to say no to the West of Ifield development?

Stuart Andrew: I am absolutely clear that communities must have a say on developments that affect them, and that is why we are making it easier and simpler to engage with the planning system. At the moment, it simply is not good enough. I recognise the specific concerns that my hon. Friend and the leader of Crawley Borough Council have raised about this development. The site itself is included in the Horsham draft plan that has been produced with Crawley council. Residents of Crawley are able to comment on that, as well as on any subsequent planning applications.

David Johnston: Constituents object not simply to the sheer number of developments in my constituency and the pressure that they place on local infrastructure, but to the environmental impact of the way the homes are constructed. My hon. Friend knows that I would like to see a requirement for homes to be built to the latest environmental standard, rather than the one that was in place when permission was granted. Can he tell the House whether local communities will be able to have a say on how the homes are constructed, rather than just what they look like from the outside?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is right to raise that. It is a crucial area for me in this role, and I hope that he will be reassured that improving environmental standards and community engagement are key elements of our reforms. Clear local plans, tested against environmental outcomes and with strong community input, are central to that, alongside the steps we are taking through the future homes standard and the Environment Act 2021.

Mr Speaker: We come to the Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, Mr Clive Betts.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): We look forward to seeing the Minister and the Secretary of State at the Select Committee to discuss these matters early after the recess. It seems there are some genuine improvements in the proposals, particularly, as described in paragraphs 50 and 60 of the explanatory notes, the clauses that give greater strength to local plans in looking at individual planning applications.

There are two areas where the Bill might be strengthened. The first refers back to what the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) said. Yes, developers will have to set out what they intend to build, but what sanctions will the local authority have if developers do not follow those promises? The second is about what happens if a developer does not observe conditions attached to a planning permission. That has happened with Avant Homes at Owlthorpe in my constituency—I have talked to the Minister about this—where the developer is refusing to comply with a whole range of conditions, including on wheel washers, compounds for workers and engaging with the local tenants' association. I notice that the other day, the *Daily Mail* drew attention to the fact that the same developer has not met conditions in Nottinghamshire. What sanctions will the local authority have to deal with a developer in such a situation and to take into account those failures when a future planning permission is put in for?

Stuart Andrew: I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee and for the reports that fed into many of the changes we have made. He is right to raise those issues. One issue communities see far too often, and the

reason why they are sometimes opposed to development, is that they do not actually get what was promised at the beginning. I am really keen that, through the Bill, we give that power back to local communities and ensure neighbourhood plans are strengthened.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York is being overrun by investors hoovering up our new build by either leaving those properties empty or using them for Airbnb. That is causing the market to heat up, which is having a really disruptive impact and choking off opportunity for future buyers in my constituency. How will the Minister use his planning reforms to ensure we are not just building to numbers, but to local need?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Lady is right. The reforms are about empowering local communities to develop local plans and engage with the development of those local plans to identify the housing needs of each area. She is right to raise the issue on second homes and Airbnb. As I said to her the other day in the meeting we had, I look forward to potentially hosting a roundtable with her and colleagues around North Yorkshire to address those very issues.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): On the point the Minister was making about developers or planners going back on previous agreements or advice, I have a case in South Leamington, which was consulted on six years ago, where we were to have social and truly affordable housing built on a particular site. As of last week, that has been changed and we will have 80 units with 92 beds in more or less the same space. Will he meet me to discuss that matter and will he explain how the planning changes will ensure communities get what they want, which is truly affordable housing?

Stuart Andrew: Of course, I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the issue he raises. The whole point of the Bill is to strengthen the development of local plans in the first place, so local planning authorities can address the housing needs they have in their area, including the types of housing they need; and to strengthen enforcement issues around planning applications. I am more than happy to speak to him further to understand the issue in greater detail.

Access to Employment: Rural Areas

5. **Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on taking steps to improve access to employment for those without car access in (a) North Shropshire and (b) other rural areas as part of the levelling-up agenda. [900019]

The Minister for Levelling Up Communities (Kemi Badenoch): The levelling-up fund announced at the last spending review saw £1.7 billion awarded to 105 successful projects across the UK, including projects to improve access to employment for those without the use of a car in rural areas.

Helen Morgan: Market Drayton and a number of other towns in North Shropshire are seeing cuts to their bus services, with Market Drayton set to lose them all together at weekends. It has received none of the funding that it has applied for to date, including from the Bus Back Better fund. Like many other towns across Britain,

its beautiful high street is struggling to recover from the pandemic. For such towns that have been unsuccessful in their bids so far, and where people are struggling to get in and out of them, what is the Government's plan to level them up?

Kemi Badenoch: The hon. Lady needs to work with her local transport authority—that would be Shropshire Council—to look into resolving those issues. The pandemic had a huge impact on the delivery of local services and the Government provided nearly £1.86 billion in grant funding for bus services in England. Shropshire Council received about £2.17 million of that, so I encourage her to speak to the council to see what it, along with commercial bus operators, can do.

Economic Growth

6. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support economic growth across the UK. [900020]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Neil O'Brien): Our levelling-up White Paper sets out our plans to support economic growth across the whole of the UK. Since September 2020, we have allocated more than £7 billion through our levelling-up funds, including the recently announced allocation for the shared prosperity fund.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. Coastal communities such as Lowestoft and Waveney are the forgotten powerhouse of the UK economy. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the opportunities and challenges they face will be given the highest priority as the Government set about delivering their levelling-up agenda, and will the money from the Crown Estate that was originally used for the coastal communities fund be targeted at realising the full potential of coastal areas and meeting their needs?

Neil O'Brien: I have met my hon. Friend about this issue several times and I agree that coastal communities have the potential to be real powerhouses for our economy. That is why the future high streets fund has allocated £149 million to coastal local authorities, and why coastal local authorities got £287 million of funding in the first round of the levelling-up fund. That comes on top of the £229 million, which he mentioned, that we have invested in coastal towns and communities since 2012 through the coastal communities fund.

Mr Speaker: We come to the shadow Secretary of State, Lisa Nandy.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): Look, can the Minister not see the crisis unfolding across the country? There has been the biggest fall in living standards since the 1950s. Pensioners are boarding buses just to keep warm. On every measure, the gap is widening; there is less for the regions, in terms of public spending; salaries are falling; homes are less affordable; and local economies are on the verge of collapse. Surely he recognises how absurd it is that all we have had from the Secretary of State in the past week is the promise of an *al fresco* dining revolution, and three full pages of legislation giving us the power to rename our Mayors. What exactly is stopping the Government scrapping business rates, bringing in a windfall tax to cut money off energy bills,

uprating benefits now, rather than waiting till later, or doing any of the things that will get money back into people's pockets and get our economy growing?

Neil O'Brien: The hon. Lady could also have mentioned the fact that our national living wage, which this Government introduced, is putting £1,000 extra in the pockets of working people. She could have mentioned the changes to universal credit, which will make full-time workers £1,000 better off. She could have mentioned the record increase in the national insurance threshold, which will make nearly 30 million households better off, or any of the other measures that we are taking through the levelling-up agenda: the £4.8 billion being spent through the levelling-up fund; the £3.6 billion being spent through the towns fund; and the £2.6 billion that is helping to transform town centres across the country. I notice none of those things got a mention in her question.

Lisa Nandy: It is increasingly as though the Government are living on a completely different planet. The other day, the Secretary of State was in Stoke, which has had £35 million taken off it by him—that money used to flow freely back to us via Brussels—and £20 million stripped out of the local economy because the Government scrapped the £20 million universal credit uplift.

The bigger problem is that a pattern is emerging. The Secretary of State could not get money from the Chancellor. He could not get visas from the Home Secretary. He could not convince his former junior Ministers to stop closures of Department for Work and Pensions offices in the north. He could not even persuade his civil servants working on levelling up to move out of London. For all the nonsense that there has been, two thirds of his civil servants working on levelling up are trying to level us up from the capital. At least now he knows what it is like for the rest of us—in the north, Scotland, the midlands, Wales and the south-west—to be treated with total contempt by a bunch of Ministers in Whitehall. Seriously, what hope has he got of convincing us in this country that he can level us up when he cannot even convince a single one of his colleagues around the Cabinet table?

Neil O'Brien: I thank the hon. Lady for drawing attention to the Cabinet's visit to Stoke the other day; if she had been a Government Back Bencher, people would accuse her of toadying for teeing up this answer so brilliantly. She mentioned several things that allow me to mention the three successful levelling-up bids that we have had in Stoke, and she mentioned the shared prosperity fund, about which I will make a point. Under the last Labour Government, money was decided on in Brussels and then given to remote regional development agencies. That money is now going directly, with no strings attached, to the fantastic Conservative-run council in Stoke, which is transforming the fortunes of that city after years of Labour neglect.

Mr Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesperson, Patricia Gibson.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Despite the bullish posturing, the Minister knows that households across the UK are suffering terrible hardship because of the cost of living crisis, which has the Tories' name written all over it. Despite the rhetoric, the reality

is that Scotland's resource budget allocation has been cut by Westminster by 5.2%, and the capital budget allocation has been cut by Westminster by 9.7% in real terms. How can he claim to support economic growth across the UK when the Scottish Government's ability to support business, investment and people through the cost of living crisis can only be severely constrained by these cuts?

Neil O'Brien: The hon. Lady talks about Scottish public spending. The truth is that the record block grant that Scotland has just received is the biggest settlement since devolution—it is huge. For every £100 of spending elsewhere, there is £126 of public spending in Scotland. The implication in the hon. Lady's question is just not correct.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): The problem for the shadow Secretary of State is that some of us remember what 13 years of a Labour Government meant for the north of England: we received very little. Since the Government came to power, not only have they cut the Humber bridge tolls in half and supported the development of the Siemens wind turbine factory in Hull and the new Siemens train factory in Goole, but we have received huge sums of cash, including through the town deals that are coming our way. However, we want even more. Although we missed out on the levelling-up fund bid the first time round, will the Minister assure me that he will look very closely at the bids that are about to be submitted for my area for the next round of funding?

Neil O'Brien: I will look very closely at them. I hope that through the very exciting talks that are going on, and through the Hull and East Riding devolution deal, we can pick up many more of the exciting opportunities in the area. Of course, the reviews of Labour's performance in Hull are so good that it has just been kicked out of the council.

Long-term Funding Settlements

7. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What steps he is taking to deliver long-term funding settlements for the levelling-up agenda. [900021]

The Minister for Levelling Up Communities (Kemi Badenoch): We know how important multi-year certainty is to local authorities and we aim to provide it whenever possible. We are making £54.1 billion available to local government in England through this year's settlement—an increase of up to £3.7 billion on last year. We are also providing an additional £1.6 billion of grant funding per year across the spending review period.

Justin Madders: Long-term challenges need long-term solutions. We have had too much of an ad hoc bidding war, which creates winners and losers. A perfect example is my constituency: in the past three years, we have had our bids to the future high streets fund, towns fund, Restoring Your Railway fund, levelling-up fund and Bus Back Better fund rejected. Any one of those could have made a real difference to the constituency, but after each bid, we have been back at square one. Can the Minister not see that to truly level up, we need a strategy, not a lottery?

Kemi Badenoch: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's area has not been successful in bidding for funds, but I remind him that it has received £12.6 million from the shared prosperity fund. The levelling-up bids are competitive, and the strength of the bids is part of what is measured, so I encourage him and his local authorities to continue trying.

Mr Speaker: We come to the shadow Minister.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): A new study by the Centre for Business Research shows that by the end of next year, more than half the UK's slowest-growing economies will be in the north of England. So much for the Government's commitment to levelling up the country! If we want true levelling up, we need proper regional investment. Instead, we have a rolling series of beauty parades: the levelling-up fund, the towns fund, the high streets fund, the buses fund, the brownfield fund and all the others. Do Ministers really believe that levelling up is best served by making communities come cap in hand to Whitehall, where only some can win, and most must lose?

Kemi Badenoch: Competitive funding has its place, and we think that it has been an effective tool for protecting value for taxpayers' money. The hon. Gentleman knows that, as I said in answer to his colleague the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), that is not the only funding that we are providing. We have increased funding for local government by £3.7 billion.

Alex Norris: The hon. Lady knows that the story for local government over the past decade has been a devastating one. Even if an area is successful in the bids that I have talked about, it will still be worse off overall as a result of Government cuts. With this Government, the reality never matches the press release, and we see that once again with the shared prosperity fund: the Tory party promised, in its 2019 manifesto, that the amount in the fund would match the what used to be received, but now we can see that the fund is worth hundreds of millions less. So I ask the Minister what I asked the Secretary of State last month, when I received only a grammar lesson in response: levelling up is a sham, is it not?

Kemi Badenoch: I completely reject the hon. Member's assertion. It is not true that the shared prosperity fund is less; it is more. The Opposition are looking at different sources of funding to arrive at their inaccurate figures. If he would like us to explain how it works, I would be very happy to provide him with a letter.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Bloomberg's devastating forensic analysis of the Government's progress with their so-called levelling-up agenda has found no overall levelling-up progress in Scotland. On the contrary, the UK Government are levelling down Scotland compared with London, which has had significant levelling-up funding and gains since 2019. Disparities across the UK are widening. To what extent does the Minister agree with Bloomberg's analysis that the Tories are levelling down Scotland and prioritising the south of England?

Kemi Badenoch: I am afraid that is not a statement that we accept. I looked at the Bloomberg figures, and I noticed that Bloomberg was using a 2019 baseline,

when the whole purpose of levelling up is to ensure that we solve the problems identified. I would like the hon. Lady to look at the metrics that we have included in the "Levelling Up the United Kingdom" White Paper, and at the missions in it; it is through those that we will level up across the country.

Housing Associations: Right to Buy

9. **Mick Whitley** (Birkenhead) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to extend right-to-buy schemes to housing associations. [900023]

The Minister for Housing (Stuart Andrew): The Government remain committed to the right to buy and to spreading the dream of home ownership to even more people. The midlands pilots for the voluntary right to buy were completed in 2021. An independent evaluation was published; we are reviewing the findings and will announce further details in due course.

Mick Whitley: There is a desperate shortage of social housing in this country; more than 1 million households are waiting for social homes. However, rather than taking the decisive action that is needed to get to grips with this housing crisis, Ministers have threatened to jettison their manifesto commitment to building 300,000 affordable homes a year, refuse to commit themselves to building the council housing that we so desperately need, and are openly considering extending the right to buy to housing association properties. Will the Minister concede that an extension of the right to buy scheme will make the housing shortage much worse, will cause continued misery for many millions, and will deal a grievous blow to the hopes of thousands of my constituents who just want somewhere that they can call home?

Stuart Andrew: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. We have a very ambitious affordable homes programme. More than £11 billion is being spent on a range of different options. We are also introducing an infrastructure levy that makes as many, if not more, contributions to the delivery of affordable homes. I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman has a problem with giving people in social housing the opportunity to become homeowners. I have to tell him that on the council estate where I grew up, it made a real, transformational difference to the social mobility of the families who were able to enjoy that great policy.

Local Authority Budgets

10. **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help reduce financial pressures on local authority budgets. [900024]

The Minister for Levelling Up Communities (Kemi Badenoch): As I mentioned before, this year's local government finance settlement makes available £54.1 billion for councils in England—an increase of £3.7 billion on last year's settlement—to ensure that councils have the resources that they need to deliver key services. That includes more than £1 billion for councils to meet social care pressures, and a new un-ringfenced 2022-23 services grant worth £822 million.

Mohammad Yasin: As a result of the Government's actions—they cut Bedford Borough Council's revenue support grant from over £30 million in 2015 to just £6.1 million in 2022-23—local authorities have been forced to raise council tax precepts to meet vital costs. The adult social care burden is ever increasing, and cannot be paid for unless the RSG is increased to a realistic level. Will the Minister tell us when the fair funding review will finally be published?

Kemi Badenoch: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. We recognise that adult social care costs are increasing, which is why we have provided additional funding. For the hon. Gentleman's borough of Bedford, we have provided an additional £2 million for this settlement year. We will continue to look at the pressure that councils are under, but I remind him that this settlement increased budgets significantly. Bedford Borough Council received a core spending power increase of 6.5% this year, worth £9.6 million. That makes available up to £156 million-worth of spending.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Ministers cannot escape the fact that according to the National Audit Office, 50% of central Government grant funding has been cut from the budgets of local authorities up and down the land since 2010. Ministers are living in a parallel universe where less is more. Millions have been taken out of the shared prosperity fund. The consequences are all too plain. We even have Sir Rod Stewart doing DIY, filling in potholes in Essex—a county with which the Minister will be familiar—and a third of libraries are closing. Those are real consequences.

At what stage will the Minister grasp the bull by the horns and provide fair funding for local authorities, based on genuine need? This should not be about competition or jumping through unnecessary hoops; we should be providing first-class public services for all.

Kemi Badenoch: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the reason we have had such difficulties in local government spending is the terrible state of public finances that this Government found when they came into power 10 years ago. It is only because of the hard work that we have done over the last decade to repair the public finances that we have been able to provide additional funding for local government.

Local Infrastructure

11. **Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con):** What recent progress he has made in delivering an “infrastructure first” approach for planning and house building. [900025]

The Minister for Housing (Stuart Andrew): This is essential to our planning reforms. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill introduces a new infrastructure levy. It will ensure that developers contribute funding for infrastructure such as schools, GP surgeries and new roads, and it will give local authorities control over how that is provided to best meet the needs of local people and development.

Richard Fuller: Can I encourage the Minister in his push for an “infrastructure first” approach with an example from my constituency? Quite a few years ago, a developer in the village of Biddenham proposed that a GP surgery be located there, and gave some land for it. It was to bring in patients from Biddenham and the neighbouring village of Bromham. All the houses have been built, but no part of that new GP surgery has been built. The good news is that the building will start later this year, but can the Minister assure me that the problem regarding the interactions between the clinical commissioning group, Bedford Borough Council, NHS Estates, GPs, the developer and the builder will be cleared up? No one is to blame, but I bet that if he had already introduced “infrastructure first”, we would have that GP surgery today.

Stuart Andrew: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Councils, health bodies and everybody else need to get much better at this. Local planning authorities and CCGs should work together to provide the planned provision. Under our new levy, councils will be able to borrow against future levy receipts to forward-fund the infrastructure that is needed. I am arranging meetings with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to discuss the very issue that he brings to our attention.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is vital that infrastructure is provided before development is allowed. It is also vital that houses that are given planning permission are then used for the purposes agreed on when the permission was granted. I am talking about second home ownership. Homes that are built for local families become second homes, and that leads to communities being hollowed out. Will the Minister look again at bringing in new change of use rules through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, so that second homes and holiday lets fall under a separate category of planning use, and homes in Cumbria can remain for local families, and do not become part of ghost towns?

Stuart Andrew: I seem to be dealing with the issue of second homes daily; colleagues from around the country are raising it with me and highlighting their concerns for their communities. The Bill allows local councils to increase council tax on second homes, but there is more that we need to explore. That is why I am holding a series of roundtables across the country. Perhaps I could come up to the Lake district and hold one there.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): On-site community facilities are also vitally important. Last summer I was at the St Clements development in east Ipswich, where Bovis, Vistry and Trinity Estate Management have failed to meet many of their obligations. The Foxhall community centre was meant to be brought back into use, but has not been, and there are many concerns over littering and lighting. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can hold developers to account to make sure they do not let residents down, as they have over the St Clements development?

Stuart Andrew: Again, I am happy to meet my hon. Friend. He is right: when communities think that a development is coming and that there will be a particular benefit for them, and it is then not developed, it erodes

trust in the whole planning system. That is exactly what our Bill is designed to address, so that communities can have more engagement, and more confidence that what has been agreed will be delivered.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister wake up to the reality of what is going on in local authorities up and down the country? Cuts since the 2010 election have run down the resources of every planning department in the country. There are not enough professionals being trained, and not enough people to provide an adequate service. What will he do about the planning authorities across this country that cannot deliver for the public?

Stuart Andrew: One of the points of the infrastructure levy is that it takes out the necessity for negotiation. It will be a set levy that developers cannot wriggle out of, and it will be for local authorities to set the levy. Of course, we are looking at the broader issues that the hon. Gentleman raises, and I will hopefully report further on them in future.

Levelling Up: Empowering Local Leaders

12. **Simon Fell** (Barrow and Furness) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help empower local leaders to level up their communities. [900026]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Neil O'Brien): The Department is delivering the Government's plan to empower local leaders, including offering devolution deals by 2030 to anywhere in England that wants one.

Simon Fell: I thank the Secretary of State for visiting Barrow recently to see how the £25 million town deal and the £16 million levelling-up funding will transform our community.

Cumbria has just elected its first ever councillors to the new Westmorland and Furness Council and Cumberland Council. This is a historic moment for our county. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that there is further to go and that the new councillors have the opportunity to secure a bountiful devolution deal that supercharges the county with an elected Mayor? What advice would he give to them?

Neil O'Brien: I agree with my hon. Friend. I was in Barrow and Furness a couple of weeks ago, and I was struck by the fantastic progress he is helping to drive using levelling-up funds, such as the marina village, the new bridge, the new university campus and more. I was also struck by the common linkages and opportunities across Cumbria, and I can see the case for an ambitious devolution deal covering both new authorities once they are up and running.

Topical Questions

T2. [900041] **Anthony Browne** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (Michael Gove): Across Government, the Places for Growth programme has seen civil servants relocated from London and the south-east to different parts of the United Kingdom, whether it is Treasury civil servants

going to Darlington in County Durham, Home Office officials going to Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire or indeed my own officials relocating to Wolverhampton in the west midlands.

There was speculation in some newspapers at the weekend that that estimable effort by civil servants should be joined by Members of the other place. I would wholeheartedly welcome the relocation of the House of Lords to one of our great cities. In particular, the attractions of the six towns that constitute Stoke-on-Trent, as I saw last week, are formidable. If the House of Lords were to relocate to Stoke-on-Trent, it would be assured of a warm welcome in one of the most attractive places in England.

Anthony Browne: Northstowe in my constituency is the biggest new town in the UK for 50 years—the biggest since Milton Keynes. It now has 1,000 houses, but it has no dedicated community centre, no permanent café, no pub and no shop. Thousands of frustrated residents lack anywhere to go for a pint of milk or a pint of beer. This new town is also causing environmental problems. There is flooding in the neighbouring village of Swavesey, and the neighbouring village of Longstanton is running short of water. Both problems arise from the failure of the local planning authority. Will my right hon. Friend tell me what his Department might do to address these problems and to make sure they do not happen again as Northstowe is built out to 10,000 homes?

Mr Speaker: I remind people that topical questions are meant to be short and quick, not “War and Peace.”

Michael Gove: Steps taken in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill and changes to the national planning policy framework should absolutely address the problems my hon. Friend identifies. Of course, the biggest problem he identifies is the fact that, sadly, South Cambridgeshire has a Liberal Democrat-controlled local planning authority that does not care about community but pursues a narrow political agenda, to the detriment of all.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): With rent levels surging in the private sector and with the local housing allowance frozen once again, millions of hard-pressed tenants across the country are at risk of arrears and eviction. We know that rent tribunals are not an effective safeguard against punitive rent rises, and that the risk of such rises is likely only to increase when section 21 no-fault evictions are finally scrapped. Will the Secretary of State therefore tell the House why his planned renters reform Bill appears to be completely silent on protections for tenants against unaffordable rent rises?

Michael Gove: Our renters reform Bill will specifically ensure that people in the private rented sector are protected, and I look forward to working with the hon. Gentleman to ensure that the Bill satisfies the need of the hour.

T3. [900042] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): North Warwickshire Borough Council does a fantastic job of serving our local community, despite operating on a budget of only £9.5 million, which is certainly the lowest in Warwickshire and must be one of the lowest in the country. Will the Minister agree to come to my

constituency to meet the council and to see for himself the excellent work it does, and to see how it could put the levelling-up funding on offer to excellent use?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Neil O'Brien): I pay tribute to David Wright and North Warwickshire Borough Council, because they have done a fantastic job, particularly during covid, in supporting the local community and local business. I would be delighted to visit—to hop across the A5—not least because it is only 20 minutes away from Harborough.

T5. [900045] **Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): Just last year, Shropshire's Conservative-run council missed out on three levelling-up bids, and it missed out on a bus service improvement plan bid, under the Bus Back Better fund, this year. There is no doubt that Shropshire has need of these funds, so I would like to understand: what steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that levelling-up funds are allocated on the basis of need, rather than through some opaque bidding process that seems to be influenced by a council's ability to direct resources at that bid?

Michael Gove: We allocate levelling-up fund bids, as the Local Government Minister pointed out earlier, on the basis of appropriate competition in order to ensure value for money, but I have had a chance to talk to the excellent Conservative leader of Shropshire Council, Lezley Picton, to make sure that she and her superb team of Conservative councillors can deliver for the people of Shropshire, as Conservatives always have.

T4. [900044] **Craig Williams** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for delivering the shared prosperity fund, with historically high funding for mid-Wales and Montgomeryshire in particular, at more than £200 per head. I particularly thank him for the golden thread of rurality that we find in this formula, and I press him to continue delivering for rural communities.

Neil O'Brien: One reason why mid-Wales has one of highest shared prosperity fund allocations in the country is precisely because we have taken rurality and the additional costs that come with it into account, and I look forward to building on that.

T6. [900046] **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): It is clear that the Government's approach to levelling up is a postcode lottery based on their own political ambitions rather than a genuine desire to help communities. With Portsmouth's high streets in dire need of investment and our city's cultural attractions struggling with the cost of living, when will the Minister stop moving the goalposts and finally stop short-changing Portsmouth?

Michael Gove: That scored quite high on the cliché count, with “postcode lottery”, “moving the goalposts” and “narrow political calculation”. Instead of rehearsing for YouTube clips, the hon. Gentleman would be better employed looking at what we have done, not just for Portsmouth and Southampton, but for communities including Liverpool and Birkenhead, where this Government have been responsible for ensuring that local government receives the support it needs. If he

wants to hang on to his seat, he would be better employed concentrating on delivering for his residents, not making party political points.

Mr Speaker: Secretary of State, don't spoil a good day. You are having a good day so far, don't ruin it.

T7. [900047] **Felicity Buchan** (Kensington) (Con): I and my Kensington residents welcome the fact that the social housing Bill was in the Queen's Speech. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Bill will give social housing tenants the ability to hold their landlords to account? Will he also detail the likely timing of the Bill?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Eddie Hughes): My hon. Friend is right to say that the social housing Bill will help social housing tenants in Kensington to hold their landlords to account, but we are not waiting for the new legislation; we are driving the “Make Things Right” campaign to make sure that tenants understand—*[Interruption.]* I am disappointed that Opposition Members think it is funny, as I think it is completely appropriate that tenants are able to hold their landlords to account. We are making sure that they understand how to do so and how to escalate complaints to the housing ombudsman should that be necessary.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): Last week's Bloomberg report suggests that levelling up in Scotland is just not happening. Given that Scotland is self-sufficient in gas and has great offshore renewables, should not the stewardship, licensing and revenues be linked to the Scottish Government budget, rather than to Her Majesty's Treasury? Minister, when will these negotiations start? Can we kick-start some serious levelling up?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue of the importance of the Scottish Government and the UK Government working together on levelling up. That is why I am so pleased that, working with the Finance Minister in the Scottish Government, Kate Forbes, we have been able to agree a prospectus for two new freeports in Scotland. I am sure that Fife will be one of the communities, areas and local authorities that will be working with the UK Government to exploit the opportunity that freeports provide outside the European Union.

T8. [900048] **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): I welcome the proposals to ensure that empty shops have to be rented, but will the Minister explain whom they will be rented to? Will this enable upper floors to be converted to much-needed affordable housing? When will we see progress on filling key visible empty units in town centres such as Barnstaple?

The Minister for Housing (Stuart Andrew): High street rental auctions will apply to commercial property and make tenancies more accessible to businesses and community groups. We recognise the importance of diversifying high streets and have introduced permitted development rights to allow a wide range of commercial buildings to be changed to residential use without the need for a planning application. My hon. Friend is right: depending on the circumstances and the type of building, there could be opportunities to increase housing in areas such as hers where there are real challenges.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): In the Homes for Ukraine scheme, it is left to the individuals involved to sort out matches with hosts for themselves, often through ad hoc Facebook groups. It is not surprising that that has led to reports such as:

“Ukrainian refugees using Facebook groups to seek a safe home in the UK are being put at risk of sexual exploitation”.

Criminal record checks on their own cannot prevent such exploitation. What assurance can the Secretary of State give in respect of the rigour and effectiveness of the separate home checks that are undertaken for the scheme?

Michael Gove: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important question. I am very grateful to the more than 100,000 UK citizens who have signed up to offer their homes for the scheme. As well as criminal record and police national computer checks before visas are granted, there are vetting and barring and other checks, often conducted by local authorities, at the time that individuals find themselves in homes. I would be more than happy to provide the right hon. Gentleman and others with a full briefing about the processes we undertake.

T9. [900049] **Darren Henry** (Broxtowe) (Con): In my constituency, the borough council has recently built new housing specifically for military veterans. As an ex-serviceperson myself, I was delighted to see this. Will the Minister please outline what more the Government are doing to make sure that there is housing for our veterans?

Eddie Hughes: I thank my hon. Friend for his service to his country. The Government are committed to making the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran. Veterans with urgent housing needs are always given high priority for social housing, and we are investing £11.5 billion under the affordable homes programme to deliver more social homes, including housing for veterans.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): For many in the privately rented sector, the Government are like Nero, fiddling while Rome burns. When are they going to get on and publish the timetable for the renters reform Bill? Last week’s was the third Queen’s Speech in which the Bill has been mentioned, yet there is still no timetable, while section 21 evictions are on the increase in many of our constituencies.

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady suggests we are being Neronian in fiddling while Rome burns, but I prefer to think that we are like Julius Caesar: we have crossed the Rubicon, *alea iacta est*—the die has been cast—and the Bill will be on the statute book in this parliamentary Session.

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con): The Forget-Me-Not group in Blyth is working hard to secure better opportunities for everyone in its local area of Cowpen Quay; however, the group needs a base in the community to house and deliver its services. This is grassroots levelling up, so will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree to meet me to discuss exactly what we can do to help these people?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the work of the Forget-Me-Not group in Blyth, which is doing amazing work in Cowpen Quay. I will do everything I can to support the group and will meet my hon. Friend to do so.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Will Ministers join me in recognising and commending the work of Ellel parish councillor Lisa Corkerry? She is never afraid to don the marigolds, grab the litter pickers and clean up Galgate. Lisa would like to know when the Government are going to provide adequate funds for local authorities such that she can put her efforts into making her community better rather than clearing up the mess left behind by others.

Michael Gove: The local councillor the hon. Lady mentions sounds like an absolutely brilliant champion for her local community. I would love to know more, particularly about what we can do to help in practical terms, and I look forward to working with her.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): Energy performance improvements to domestic dwellings are an important part of the Government’s agenda in respect of climate change obligations, as well as in respect of the cost of living. May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to private-rented off-grid properties, for which it is much more difficult and expensive to achieve energy performance improvements than for normal domestic dwellings?

Eddie Hughes: It will indeed be much more challenging, which is why I am working closely with the Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Lord Callanan, to see how we can address the problem. I look forward to discussing the issue further with my right hon. Friend to see how we can find an appropriate solution.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): Many agree that investment in levelling up should be not a competition but a considered plan created in partnership between central and local government to address the areas of greatest need. Ministers are meeting many Conservative MPs, but will the Minister meet me to discuss the levelling-up bid for my area to fund the Horden masterplan as well as to identify funding for other much-needed regeneration schemes in Easington Colliery and Peterlee town centre?

Michael Gove: Durham is on the up and east Durham must be part of that story, so, of course, we will make sure that a Minister meets the hon. Gentleman to discuss what we can do to help.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Full fibre broadband coverage is essential to the Government’s aim to level up, but we lag behind most of Europe in rolling it out. What discussions has the Minister had with the Culture Secretary to ensure that the Government have a strategy to work with industry to improve coverage and speed up progress in rural and urban areas of the devolved nations, which currently have the poorest broadband?

Michael Gove: The Culture Secretary and I talk daily. One thing at the top of our agenda is ensuring that we have connectivity across the whole United Kingdom. We are, of course, working with the devolved Administrations to make sure that every citizen of the United Kingdom benefits from UK Government investment.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I am sure that the Secretary of State will want to acknowledge the increasingly important role played by metro Mayors. May I therefore encourage him to make contact with Mayor Tracy Brabin, the excellent metro Mayor for West Yorkshire who now chairs cross-party group of Mayors, the M10, to ensure the closest working relationship between national, regional and local government?

Michael Gove: I take the opportunity to thank the hon. Gentleman for his years of service as metro Mayor for South Yorkshire, during which, all party political differences aside, he did a superb job. I also congratulate his successor, Oliver Coppard. I look forward to working with Oliver and, of course, Tracy Brabin in the years ahead.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): One of my constituents wants to sponsor a family of Ukrainian children, but the pause in applications has delayed the family's ability to travel to the UK because they are travelling separately. The delay cannot be about safeguarding, as Ministers have claimed, because it has made them less safe. Will the Secretary of State intervene with his ministerial colleagues and enable Ukrainian children who are at risk to reach sanctuary in this country as soon as possible?

Michael Gove: I cannot comment on any individual case, but it is absolutely the Government's responsibility to ensure that as many Ukrainian parents and children benefit from our scheme as possible. We have to balance safeguarding concerns with the policy of the Ukrainian Government, but the hon. Gentleman raises an important question, and more will follow.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The levelling-up White Paper offered practically no new investment for the north-east, but it did have grandiose missions. Now we see from the draft Bill that those

missions—and targets—can be changed at will by Ministers. Is not that a cheater's charter, and are the missions worth the White Paper they are written on?

Michael Gove: Newcastle has benefited from great civic leadership from Nick Forbes, who, sadly, is no longer the leader of Newcastle City Council as a result of a Corbynite coup. I want to thank him for his leadership. I stress that the missions can change because we live in a democracy, and this House should be capable of deciding the destiny of this nation. For that reason—*[Interruption.]* I know that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) finds the idea of democracy laughable, but democracy, I am afraid, returned a Conservative Government in 2019 to level up and unite this country, and that is the mission we will fulfil.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): The Secretary of State likes to discuss the shared prosperity fund in abstract policy terms, but let us bring it back to brass tacks. In Angus, in 2019, we received £2,750,186 from the EU's structural fund. Can he assure my constituents that we will get at least that, plus inflation, minus the Union Jack ribbon?

Michael Gove: Whether they are in Arbroath, Montrose or Kirriemuir, people will recognise the vital importance of UK shared prosperity funding and other funding. When the hon. Gentleman talks about "no Union Jack ribbon" is he really suggesting, for example, that UK armed forces based in Arbroath and Montrose should leave? Is that what he is suggesting? Is he suggesting that we rip up the Union Jack in order to make a narrow, nationalist political point? Does he want the Marines to leave his constituency? That is what it sounds like to me. It sounds to me that he is more prepared to make a narrow, partisan nationalist point than to see this country defended at a time of testing.

Mr Speaker: I am almost tempted to call another question, but let us move on.

Shireen Abu Aqla

3.34 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if she will make a statement on the killing of Shireen Abu Aqla.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Vicky Ford): The United Kingdom Government was shocked to hear of the very sad death of the respected and renowned journalist Shireen Abu Aqla while working in the west bank. On 11 May, the Foreign Secretary and UK Ministers made clear our concern, and we have called for a thorough investigation into the events. On 13 May, in company with the other members of the United Nations Security Council, we strongly condemned the killing and stressed the importance of an immediate, thorough, transparent, fair and impartial investigation. We also stressed the need to ensure accountability.

The work of journalists across the globe is vital and they must be protected to carry out their work and defend media freedom. We were also deeply distressed by the scenes at the funeral of Shireen Abu Aqla on Friday. Her death was a tragedy and those mourning must be treated with respect and dignity. The situation on the ground makes clear the need to make progress towards a peaceful two-state solution and the UK stands ready to support.

Bambos Charalambous: Shireen Abu Aqla was a veteran correspondent of al-Jazeera's Arabic news channel and on Wednesday 11 May she was killed while covering Israeli army raids in the city of Jenin in the northern occupied west bank. Her killing has been widely condemned by world leaders, the UN and civil society, and it has shocked the world.

The killing of Shireen Abu Aqla was not only an outrageous act, but an attack on the freedom of the media and the independence of journalists working around the world, playing a crucial role in reporting conflicts, seeking truth and telling the stories of those affected. On Friday, deeply disturbing footage was released from Shireen's funeral. The scenes of violence at the funeral were appalling: Israeli police were seen firing teargas at mourners and attacking them with batons, almost causing the pallbearers to drop the coffin and send it crashing to the ground. The attacks on mourners were indefensible and only heightened demands for justice and the pain felt by Shireen's family.

The Labour party unequivocally condemns the violence by Israeli forces. International and human rights must be upheld, and we stand with all those demanding accountability for the killing of Shireen. There must be an urgent, independent and impartial inquiry to secure that. More widely, we will continue to support justice and the protection of the human rights of the Palestinian people and a sovereign Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel. Tensions in the region were already high: Israel has seen a number of deadly terrorist attacks and both Israelis and Palestinians have been killed in what has been the worst wave of violence and attacks in Israel in years. We are deeply concerned that Shireen's death and the treatment of mourners at her funeral could spark further cycles of violence.

Has the Minister made any representations to her Israeli counterparts on the killing of Shireen Abu Aqla? Will she condemn the violence at Shireen's funeral? Can she confirm that her Department will stand up for international and human rights by encouraging an independent inquiry into Shireen's killing so that we can ensure that there is accountability for her death?

Vicky Ford: I thank the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) for his comments. He is right that Shireen's death was outrageous and shocked the world. He is also right to mention the very disturbing scenes at her funeral. It is so important that mourners are given respect and dignity, and indeed that the deceased is shown respect and dignity. That was immediately called out over the weekend by my fellow Minister, Lord Ahmad.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the investigation and we are working with other members of the UN Security Council to give that firm statement that we want an investigation, which needs to be immediate, thorough and, crucially, impartial.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for her answer to the urgent question. Clearly there is a concern that we do not know exactly what happened on that terrible day when the journalist was killed. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority need to co-operate so that there can be a full and thorough investigation that is seen to be independent? Does she regret the fact that the Palestinian Authority are refusing to hand over the bullet that killed the journalist?

Vicky Ford: My hon. Friend, as ever, is right; it is absolutely key that the investigation happens swiftly, and that it is thorough and impartial.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson, Brendan O'Hara.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): We on the SNP Benches unequivocally condemn the murder of Shireen Abu Aqla, one of the Arab world's most respected journalists, who was shot dead by the Israeli army despite wearing full press coverings, body armour and a helmet. Shireen's death takes to 50 the number of journalists who have been killed by the Israeli occupation forces over the past 20 years—deaths for which no one has ever been held to account. It is therefore absolutely essential that, along with the EU, the United States and the UN, all democracies unreservedly condemn the killing, and all who support a full, impartial and transparent investigation must be supported.

Does the Minister agree that the investigation should be carried out by the International Criminal Court, so that the person responsible for this awful crime can be found, tried and, if convicted, given an appropriate sentence? What sanction against Israel does she think would be appropriate in those circumstances? Finally, will she also unreservedly condemn the disgraceful actions of the Israeli police when on Friday they attacked Shireen's cortege with batons and stun grenades, denying her even in death any sort of dignity or respect?

Vicky Ford: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the killing has been condemned across the world, and indeed by us in the UK. As I have said, we have

called for an immediate, thorough, transparent, fair and impartial investigation. It is really important that that happens soon and that it is very thorough. I think that we were all completely shocked by the scenes at her funeral. We are deeply concerned about the rise in violent attacks in the area, and we continue to call for peace, as we always have done; working to deliver peace is our top priority. She was an incredibly respected journalist and the hon. Gentleman is right to point to the risk to journalists across the world. I believe that across the world 26 journalists have been killed so far this year, including six in Ukraine—it might even be more since the last update I received. We must stand for journalists and for media freedom.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): My hon. Friend is entirely right to express concern about the scenes at the funeral of Shireen Abu Aqla, but given that there can be absolutely no doubt as to what happened at the funeral, when mourners and pallbearers were attacked by Israeli police officers, will she confirm that the Government have already made representations to the Israeli authorities expressing concern and indicating how deplorable those scenes were?

Vicky Ford: Yes, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right about the deplorable scenes. We have already stated that we are deeply disturbed by those scenes, and we are looking at what further measures might be taken. Most importantly, we continue to call for urgent steps to de-escalate tensions and for restraint in the use of force. It is absolutely vital that tensions are reduced and that we get parties back to dialogue and working towards peace.

Mr Speaker: Let us help each other by trying to be brief because we have major pressures afterwards—but I understand the feeling in the House. I am now going to call the others who put in for the UQ that unfortunately was not taken. I call Naz Shah.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

First, I send my condolences to the family and friends of Shireen Abu Aqla, a true Palestinian heroine who was brutally shot in the head and murdered. Let us be clear: this is not a one-off attack on journalists by Israel. We cannot forget that Israel had a raid last May on the al-Jalaa building that hosted Al Jazeera and the Associated Press office. This is not just the story of Shireen either, but many other journalists, including the 55 Palestinian journalists killed since 2000. How can the Palestinians have any faith in Israel to hand over any bullet and with this whitewash of an idea that they are going to investigate when nobody has been held to account over lots and lots of years? What representations are the Minister and this Government making to their Israeli counterparts to make sure that we get justice on this occasion, not just for Shireen but for all the Palestinians who are continually being brutalised?

Vicky Ford: The UK is very concerned by the number of Palestinians who have been killed by Israeli security forces in recent weeks. We continue to urge for thorough and transparent investigations into the deaths of Palestinian civilians and call again for restraint in the use of force.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that 19 Israelis, not including foreign nationals, have also been killed by terrorism since 21 March, and that Jewish lives, and Israeli lives, matter as much as the life of the journalist who tragically lost her life? Is she also aware that a Hamas leader recently incited the Palestinians to act in ways of terrorism with the use of the knife and the gun? What is she doing to help the Israelis to combat terrorism and these awful murders of Israeli citizens?

Vicky Ford: This is an important point. Israel does have a legitimate right to self-defence and the right to defend its citizens from attack, but it is absolutely vital that all actions are proportionate and in line with international humanitarian law, and they must make every effort to avoid civilian casualties.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): I send my condolences to Shireen's family, friends and colleagues at Al Jazeera. She was unlawfully killed while doing the job she loved and was greatly respected for, while clearly identified as a journalist, in what can only be described as a targeted attack for reporting actions of Israeli forces in the occupied territory of Jenin. Does the Minister agree that an international criminal court should undertake a full independent, not just impartial, investigation, and that swift action should be taken to bring those responsible to justice?

Vicky Ford: I thank the hon. Member for reminding us that there are family and friends involved. I add my condolences and those of the Government to the family and friends of Shireen. In losing such a talented person in such an awful situation, my thoughts are with them. We have called for an immediate investigation that does need to be fair and impartial, because it needs to have the trust of all those in the area. That is why it is so important that it happens soon.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I draw the attention of the House to my declaration in the register as a founder director of the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians. In that respect, I have since then avoided engagement on Palestinian issues in this House. However, this Opposition urgent question about the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Aqla, almost certainly by a targeted shot coming from the forces who are in illegal occupation of a Palestinian territory, allows me to ask how long we must wait for the United Kingdom to actually do anything to enforce accountability on the state of Israel for its gross and worsening breach, over 55 years, of the fourth Geneva convention, while noting the shaming contrast with our own brave and principled policy towards Ukraine.

Vicky Ford: My hon. Friend is right to be concerned. The UK Government are very concerned about the very fragile security situation in Jerusalem. We continue to call on all parties to de-escalate tensions. The British ambassador to Israel and the British consulate general in Jerusalem have been engaging with Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to support them in restoring calm. We have made it clear that there is a need to protect holy sites. This sort of horrific violence against civilians is truly contemptible. We absolutely call on all sides to de-escalate the situation and come to the dialogue tables to work towards peace.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I acknowledge my role as chair of Labour Friends of Israel. The killing and the events at the funeral are shocking by any standards. I absolutely condemn what happened at the funeral, but as I understand it Shireen Abu Aqla was killed during a gun battle; the facts have not yet been established, and the Palestinians have rejected an offer of a joint investigation with the Israelis. Surely in this place it helps no one to state as fact what people want or feel inclined to believe. Will the Minister do everything to offer British resources and assistance to ensure that an independent, impartial investigation is established, and that we participate in it, if that would be helpful?

Vicky Ford: We are not only calling for that investigation but working with other members of the UN Security Council on that joint statement from countries around the world strongly condemning the killing and stressing the importance of the investigation.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): Shireen Abu Aqla has been referred to as the voice of events in Palestine as part of a much-needed open and free press, but there are fears that her killing will spark refreshed conflict in the west bank. Can my hon. Friend assure the House that if anything can come from this tragedy, it is that it is the Government's priority to secure peace in the region?

Vicky Ford: Our priority in the region has always been to work towards peace; that is why it is vital that tensions are de-escalated now. That is what we are urging the authorities to do on the ground: de-escalate, come back to dialogue and work towards peace.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I acknowledge my role as chair of Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East and of the Britain-Palestine all-party parliamentary group. Will the Minister state exactly how the Government intend to support an impartial investigation, which needs to be independent? Under this Government this country has a poor track record on impartial investigations, including on the issue of the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, which the Prime Minister opposed, as well as the UN commission of inquiry report on Gaza, from which the UK abstained.

Vicky Ford: The immediate actions that we have taken have been, first, to condemn the situation and then to work with the UN Security Council on that joint statement of condemnation which also calls for the investigation. We are obviously using our own diplomatic links both in Israel and in Jerusalem, engaging with the leaderships; and, of course, we will always look at what further measures should be taken.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): The Minister is right to condemn the recent terror attacks on innocent Israelis, which are increasingly being directed from the west bank by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. She is also right to condemn this killing and to express her belief, which we all share, that journalists should be allowed to report anywhere safely. However, too many people, for whatever reason—sinister or otherwise—have already determined what the facts are, and did so as soon as the story broke. I urge my hon. Friend once

again to ensure that the UK Government's position continues to be in support of an independent inquiry, and emphasise that any inquiry, if it is to be worth anything at all, will require the buy-in of both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, or else it will simply become a political dividing line.

Vicky Ford: That is precisely why it is so important that the UN Security Council has described in such detail the need for the investigation to be immediate, thorough, transparent and fair, as well as impartial.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Shireen Abu Aqla was a Christian Palestinian like my family, and her death feels like we have lost a sister. The scenes from the funeral were deeply upsetting, but the Minister may be aware that the Israeli police were trying to segregate the Christians from the Muslims in their mourning. Indeed, the day before they had stormed Shireen's house. They went in, disturbed the wake and took a Palestinian flag from the room. It is disgraceful, and it is a clear provocation. I ask the Minister simply this: has she summoned the Israeli ambassador to make it clear how unhelpful to the peace process this is?

Vicky Ford: We have made very clear the need to restore calm, we have made it very clear that we condemn this action and we will always look at what further steps should be taken.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): Shireen Abu Aqla was a respected journalist, and I thank the Minister for her statement. I am pleased at the role the UK played, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, in securing unanimity in its condemnation. Does the Minister share my concerns about what this means to the relationship between the Palestinian and Israeli communities over the long term, and does she agree that the best action in memory of Shireen Abu Aqla would be an open and transparent investigation participated in by all parties?

Vicky Ford: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I said in my opening statement, both those who mourn her and she herself should be treated with respect and dignity. Again, that is another reason why this investigation needs to be so thorough. It needs to be deep, it needs to be fair, it needs to be impartial and it needs to happen soon. We are very concerned about the escalating tensions we have seen over recent weeks and months with increased violence, and it is really important to fight for calm rather than see more violence.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): The reality remains that every time a Palestinian child is born there is one certainty—that in life they will face persecution, oppression and humiliation at the hands of an occupying Israeli military. However, the soul-shattering scenes we saw last week, with the funeral procession of Shireen Abu Aqla brutally attacked by the Israeli security forces, now mean that they will be stripped of their dignity in death as well. Yet again, all the international community and this Government do is offer empty words, so I ask the Minister: just what are this Government waiting for, and why will they not immediately recognise the state of Palestine? What message are this Government sending to Palestinians, who have now been stripped of their dignity in life and death?

Vicky Ford: We consistently call for an immediate end to all actions of violence, and we immediately call out—and continue to do so—against all actions that undermine the viability of a two-state solution. We are also a key development actor in the region, especially working to lift the overall standards of living for Palestinians and to meet humanitarian needs. The hon. Member asks about recognising a Palestinian state. We will recognise a Palestinian state at the time when it best serves the objective of peace, because achieving peace is our primary objective.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests in relation to a recent delegation to Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

As has already been stated, the Palestinian Authority have so far refused to participate in a joint investigation into the tragic death of Shireen Abu Aqla. An initial autopsy has found that it is not possible to tell whether she was killed by Israeli or Palestinian gunfire. Facts matter, so does my hon. Friend agree that those who, for whatever reason, are jumping to blame Israel will only deepen division and make peace harder to achieve?

Vicky Ford: It is really important that there is a proper investigation—a thorough, fair and impartial investigation—but I repeat that we are concerned by the number of Palestinians who have been killed by Israeli security forces in recent weeks, and we urge thorough and transparent investigations into the deaths of civilians as well. It is really important that there is restraint in the use of force, and we will continue to say that again and again.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): A constituent of mine who went to school with Shireen Abu Aqla has been in touch to share her sense of helplessness at what seems to be yet another state-sanctioned killing in the occupied territories. She said to me at the weekend that it seems to her that it is always incumbent on the Palestinians to prove their innocence and fight for basic human sympathy for the events that befall them. I fully accept that the killing has to be investigated independently, but having regard to what followed—the raiding of the home, the appalling behaviour of the Israeli authorities at the funeral—can the Minister please answer the question she was asked earlier: will she summon the Israeli ambassador? Clearly, the Minister feels outrage at what has happened—she has been very honest about that—so will she summon the Israeli ambassador to communicate her outrage?

Vicky Ford: We have been very clear that we have condemned this killing. We absolutely share the hon. and learned Member's concern for the distressing and disturbing scenes at the funeral. We have called for a thorough investigation, we have called for respect and dignity, and we call for all parties to reduce the tensions and to come and work together towards peace. Delivering peace is what Shireen would have wanted and is what we all want.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), the chairman of Labour Friends of Israel, said earlier,

this was in the middle of a gun battle between Israeli forces and Palestinian forces. The Labour Friends of Israel chairman is right, and my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) is also right in saying that the initial autopsy—which was conducted by the Palestinian authorities, not the Israeli authorities—said that it was impossible because the bullet removed was a 5.56x45 mm NATO round used both by the Israelis and the Palestinians. Therefore, may I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure and put pressure to ensure that this is an independent inquiry, because justice must not only be done, but be seen to be done?

Vicky Ford: My hon. Friend is right about justice: justice is really important. We absolutely condemn this killing and will continue to stress the need for the investigation to be fair, impartial, thorough and prompt.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I am secretary of the National Union of Journalists parliamentary group and we have raised these issues before, but, with regard to this killing, let us put it in the context of the systematic abuse of Palestinian journalists. The International Federation of Journalists already a month ago referred these incidents to the International Criminal Court. May I therefore, in that context, and in view of the happenings subsequent to the killing, which were disgraceful, repeat the question for the third time? The minimal action any Government can take is to call the ambassador in to express the concerns of the Government about the Israeli state's behaviour, so can we ask for the third time: have the Government invited, or do they intend to invite, the Israeli ambassador to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office for that discussion?

Vicky Ford: I have been very clear about the actions the Government have taken to date. We continue to condemn this, we have called for an investigation, we have, through our ambassadors and the British consul in Israel and in Jerusalem, made very clear our position supporting the leaders to restore calm, the need to protect holy sites and the need for dialogue to move towards peace, and of course we always take any future measures into consideration.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will have heard Members across the House calling for not just an impartial investigation, but an independent investigation. I will tell her why it matters: because in this modern world, independent fact checkers have been able to put together compelling, open-source evidence that points clearly to the responsibility of the Israeli forces for the murder of Shireen Abu Aqla. Given that, will the Minister confirm that the UK's official position is that there should be an independent inquiry, not just an impartial one, so that the Israelis and the Palestinians can both have confidence in the outcomes? Will she clarify that: yes or no?

Vicky Ford: I think that it is really important that we work with partners across the world through the UN Security Council. It is the UN Security Council's wording, agreed among all those countries, that calls for an impartial investigation. That is the wording that has been agreed by the UN Security Council.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I find it heartbreaking that, after decades of violence, illegal occupation, demolition of Palestinian homes and complete disregard for human rights, the UK has failed in its obligation and duty to recognise the state of Palestine. It took the Foreign Secretary more than 24 hours to put out a statement after the murder of al-Jazeera's esteemed journalist Shireen Abu Aqla. What message does that send to those responsible for Shireen's tragic murder? In the light of the history, why are the Government not pushing for a full independent inquiry? Given the close relationship between the UK and Israel, now, for the fourth time of asking, will the Minister summon the Israeli ambassador to demonstrate the outrage at the behaviour of security forces during Shireen's funeral?

Vicky Ford: Shireen's death was a true tragedy and we have condemned it. On 11 May, the Foreign Secretary condemned it. We have also worked very rapidly with our colleagues at the UN Security Council to deliver the joint statement of condemnation and to call for the investigation that I have mentioned. We continue to press for peace. We saw those very distressing images at the funeral and will always look at what further steps should be taken.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, including my role as co-chair of the cross-party National Union of Journalists group and on various Palestinian groups. I want the Minister and Members to imagine for a moment attending the funeral of a family member or friend. In what circumstances would what we witnessed on our TV screens happening to the pallbearers carrying the coffin be reasonable or proportionate? How can it be acceptable for the police or security services of any nation to attack pallbearers to the extent that the coffin falls on the ground? Not only do we call for the Minister's condemnation, but, for a fifth time, I call on her to summon the Israeli ambassador here to account for her actions.

Vicky Ford: I have attended many funerals in my life, from early childhood, and that is one that will always stay with me. Mourners should always be treated with respect and dignity. Shireen and her family should have been treated with respect and dignity. We totally condemn her death and the manner in which she died. We believe that this really urgent investigation is needed to help to rebuild peace. That must be our priority.

Mr Speaker: I call Liz Saville Roberts.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Llefarydd. The International Federation of Journalists' complaint to the ICC about the treatment of Palestinian journalists is about not only protecting the human rights of journalists, but safeguarding the work that they do as a profession to protect collective human rights. The Secretary of State has spoken many times about the need for an independent and impartial investigation. To ensure that independence and impartiality, will she support the IFJ's complaint to the International Criminal Court to ensure those very virtues?

Vicky Ford: As I said, we have been working with our friends and other members of the UN Security Council on the joint statement about the investigation. I do not have any further details that I can share with the right hon. Member at present.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): As if the ongoing dispossession and discrimination faced by the Palestinian people was not enough cruelty, Israel continuously targets Palestinian journalists. There is not only the murder by Israeli snipers of Shireen Abu Aqla, who for decades bravely reported the crimes inflicted on her people. Since 2000, Israel has killed an estimated 51 Palestinian journalists and an independent UN commission of inquiry found that, during the 2018 march of return, Israeli snipers intentionally shot Palestinian journalists who were clearly marked as such, killing Yasser Murtaja and Ahmed Abu Hussein. What will it take for the Government to stop equivocating over these horrific crimes and hold Israel to account for its routine violations of international humanitarian law? And for the seventh time, will the Minister summon the Israeli ambassador?

Vicky Ford: We stand by journalists all across the world and it is a tragedy that so many journalists have been killed in recent years, and particularly this year. That is why we continue to raise issues of media freedom on the global stage. In February in Estonia, we announced support for the secretariat for the Media Freedom Coalition, which we founded and which now has 52 members. We will absolutely stand for media freedom and for journalists all across the world.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is important that the Minister has condemned this killing this afternoon and I thank her for doing so several times. Many of us are puzzled by her reluctance to summon the Israeli ambassador; that seems like the first step that should have been taken. Will the Government now commit to supporting the International Criminal Court investigations into not only this incident, but the wider behaviour of the Israeli Defence Forces in the occupied territories?

Vicky Ford: Not only have we worked with other members of the UN Security Council in strongly condemning this incident and needing to have this investigation, as I have mentioned, but we have been very clear that we are very concerned about other incidents of Palestinian civilians being killed by Israeli security forces in recent weeks. We continue to urge further transparent investigations of those killings as well.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Another journalist is murdered in occupied Palestine. Next, the occupying power raids her family home, and then its forces brutally attack pallbearers and mourners at Shireen's funeral. In the light of that, the Government's response has been pathetic and inadequate. The Minister will not even call for an independent investigation—that is, independent of the Israeli forces, who have whitewashed previous deaths in this way. Will she do that? Will she say what single step the Government have taken—not said, but taken—to oppose the occupation of Palestine, which is at the root of this violence? Will they recognise Palestine? Will they ban trade with illegal settlements? Will they sign up to the ICC inquiry? If not, her words are completely empty.

Vicky Ford: As I have said really clearly, we have led work at the UN to make sure that there is a joint statement not just from us, but from the entire security—

Andy Slaughter: Answer the question!

Vicky Ford: I am answering the question—please do not heckle me.

This is a tragic death—a really tragic death. We have led the work at the United Nations to put the pressure on to make sure, to the best extent that we can, that this investigation happens, that it is fair and transparent, and therefore, to use the word that the UN has used—I will repeat this, because it is the word from the statement—that it is “impartial”. The hon. Gentleman asked about the settlements. We are very clear that settlements are illegal under international law. They call into question Israel’s commitment to the two-state solution. We urge Israel to halt its settlement expansion—that threatens the viability of a Palestinian state—and we will continue, always, to press for peace.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does the Minister appreciate that everyone in this House regrets the killing of men and women in Israel, whether they are Israeli or Palestinian? It is quite wrong to imply anything else. There has been talk of the necessity of establishing the facts. Does she appreciate that the facts of the terrible scenes at Shireen’s funeral are beyond doubt? Millions of people around the world have seen those images. Finally, does she understand that it is no use telling us that Shireen’s death is a tragedy? We know that. We will take her words seriously only when she commits this afternoon, in this House, to calling the Israeli ambassador to the Foreign Office. Otherwise, her words are just words.

Vicky Ford: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right that all deaths in this situation are a total tragedy. What happened at Shireen’s funeral should not have happened. I cannot give further comment at this point; I have told her what we are doing, and that Ministers always consider what further steps can be taken. Our fundamental priority must be to continue urging a de-escalation of tensions, an end to violence and a pathway to peace.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): The murder of Shireen Abu Aqla and the attacks on mourners at her funeral have shocked the world. It is not enough to condemn those actions; we must take action. When will the UK Government stop authorising arms sales to Israel, as we know they are killing innocent Palestinians?

Vicky Ford: We take the export of arms extremely seriously. As has been said many times in this House, the United Kingdom has one of the most robust arms export control regimes anywhere in the world. I hope all hon. and right hon. Members would agree that the important thing now is to call on all parties to de-escalate the tensions and to work towards peace.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): In the Minister’s statement and subsequent answers, she mentioned her attempts to get a statement at the United Nations. The problem is that Israel has consistently ignored any critical statements coming out of the UN, and has even sought to undermine the legitimacy of the UN and other international institutions. Why does she think this time will be any different?

Vicky Ford: It is important that voices from across the world have condemned this awful deed.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): This is not the first time this has happened; nor will it be the last. Under occupation, Palestinians’ human rights are abused, and as we have seen, they cannot even bury their dead with dignity. Does the Minister understand that until we have a lasting peace, we will not tackle the situation at its root? Does she understand that although the UK has committed to a two-state solution, we cannot have two states if only one is recognised? Perhaps she would like to reconsider her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) and tell us when exactly she will recognise the Palestinian state.

Vicky Ford: It is clear that unilateral recognition, by itself, will not end the occupation. We need the parties to come to talks and to work towards peace.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): The killing of Shireen Abu Aqla by the Israeli military and the subsequent attack on her funeral in Jerusalem demonstrate the reality of the occupation of the west bank. Amnesty International has said that it constitutes apartheid, which is a crime against humanity as defined in the Rome statute and the apartheid convention. Will the Minister not only condemn this act of inhumanity but commit now to summoning the Israeli ambassador? Will she take steps to ensure that the UK ceases all arms trade with Israel, and to ensure that Britain is not complicit in the illegal occupation of Palestine?

Vicky Ford: I have already stated many times the actions that we are taking. Of course Ministers consider, at all times, what further steps might be taken.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I have had a great many letters from my constituents since the brutal murder of Shireen Abu Aqla, as have, I am sure, many other Members from across the House. They are saddened. They are sickened by the scenes at her funeral. They are also deeply angry about the lack of reaction. The Minister said the word “impartial”, but can she not press the Government to push for an independent investigation into this death? Will she please place on record for the House the dates and agendas of the meetings she has had with the Israeli ambassador? We need some sort of resolution, and to establish a two-state solution in that land.

Vicky Ford: The most important thing about the investigation is that it be accountable and ensures that those who carried out this act be held to account. That is why we worked towards wording that says it should be immediate, thorough, transparent, fair and impartial; and the most important thing is accountability. I cannot, from the Dispatch Box, tell the hon. Gentleman what meetings I have had, as I am not the Minister with responsibility for the middle east, but I am sure that we can follow up in writing.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Surely the appalling desecration of the funeral of Shireen Abu Aqla is evidence, if any more were needed, of the crime of apartheid that is being inflicted on the Palestinian people and has been rigorously documented by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Israeli human rights organisation B’Tselem. Instead of passing

[Andy McDonald]

laws to ban local authorities and civil society from taking action against this brutal occupation, is it not time to accept the legal analysis of those human rights organisations, and do the right and moral thing and impose sanctions in response to this appalling criminality?

Vicky Ford: I am afraid I need to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, because we do not believe that boycotts, divestment or sanctions would help to create an atmosphere conducive to peace. I note that he used the word apartheid. We do not use that terminology, and we do not agree with its use, because it is a legal term, and a judgment on whether it can be used under international law needs to come through a judicial decision; that is really important. One thing I agree with him on, however, is that civil society always plays an important part in a democracy.

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): The sad reality is that the horrific murder of Shireen is just another tragedy in 74 years of unaddressed ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, yet rather than sanction Israel for that behaviour, 55 years after occupation began, the UK Government are busy strengthening relations with it through new trade deals. I ask the Minister, for the first time: why will she not summon the ambassador of Israel to the Foreign Office?

Vicky Ford: The most important thing we need to do is try to work towards peace. That is why we condemn this incident and are working for it to be condemned internationally, and why we called for the investigation. We want people to be held to account. That is why we are working with our ambassadors and the British Council in Jerusalem in Israel to try to de-escalate tensions.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): We know that Shireen was wearing a press vest and helmet, yet in addressing the circumstances of her murder, an Israeli military spokesperson said:

“They’re armed with cameras, if you’ll permit me to say so.”

Will the Minister be unequivocal in her support for journalists and transparency in Palestine, condemn any sense that to carry a camera is to be armed, and reaffirm that respect for a free press should be fundamental in any state calling itself a democracy?

Vicky Ford: The United Kingdom stands on the side of journalists all around the world, wherever they are. Media freedom is a vital part of our democracy and our freedom as individuals, and we stand for journalists.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I first declare an interest as a member of a Friends of Israel group? May I also thank the Minister for her response to the urgent question? I have seen innocent bystanders killed on numerous occasions in Northern Ireland. As the Minister will know, similarities are being drawn with Lyra KcKee, a journalist reporting on the unrest in 2019 who was killed by the new IRA. Does the Minister not agree that the loss of life is truly tragic, and that all possible steps must be taken to ensure the safety of those who seek to report the news from an unbiased position? What steps does she feel her Department can take to send that message internationally?

Vicky Ford: We absolutely continue to call out attacks against journalists and media internationally. The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that attacks against journalists have happened in the United Kingdom in our history, and I remember that particular tragedy well. We are one of the leading countries in the world standing for media freedom. We founded the Media Freedom Coalition; it now has 52 members, and we should like to see more.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I send my condolences to the family and colleagues of Shireen Abu Aqla. Can the Minister confirm that, contrary to the statement of the Israeli military spokesperson, the fact that a journalist is armed with a camera does not make that journalist a target?

Vicky Ford: Journalists should never be targets.

Points of Order

4.26 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On 27 April, I raised the issue of the Prime Minister's comments about increased employment since the pandemic. After that, I wrote to the UK Statistics Authority about the issue. In its reply on 11 May, the authority's interim chair said that the Prime Minister needed to be clearer about employment statistics, and that he was running the risk of

"a misleading impression of trends in the labour market"

being given. The UK Statistics Authority has also contacted the 10 Downing Street briefing team about this matter on numerous occasions in the past few months, but the Prime Minister has continued to reiterate the claim. May I ask your advice, Mr Speaker, on what a Minister should do if they use statistics in a way that they then find could inadvertently mislead the House, and what action is open to the House to ensure that that advice is followed?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order, which will have been heard by those on the Government Front Bench. As Madam Deputy Speaker said on 27 April,

"it is important for information given to the House to be accurate...if necessary, the matter will be addressed appropriately and action taken to correct the record".—[*Official Report*, 27 April 2022; Vol. 712, c. 800.]

If the hon. Lady continues to be dissatisfied, the Table Office can advise her on ways in which to take the matter further.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance. Today the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office released its long-awaited international development strategy. This is the most significant change in policy on UK Government development since the announcement of the aid cut in November 2020. Indeed, the strategy is apparently

"the Government's vision for the future of UK...development"

and

"the heart of the UK's foreign policy".

Those are the Government's words, not mine.

I was very disappointed that the strategy was released as a written statement, rather than the Foreign Secretary's coming to the House and answering questions from Members. We spend a significant sum on official development assistance every year. Given that the strategy is highly evasive, in what I consider to be a very concerning way, about when the 0.7% of gross national income target for ODA will be restored, it deserves proper debate. Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, on how we can get the Foreign Secretary to come to the House and answer questions?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for giving me notice of that point of order. I have received no notice from Ministers that they intend to make a statement on this matter, although, as the hon. Member said, the international development strategy has been laid before the House today. The House knows that I have no power to compel a Minister to make a statement. Those on the Government Front Bench will, however, have heard the hon. Member's point of order. She is, of course, free to pursue the matter through other means, and I am sure that she knows which routes to take.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This morning, the Prime Minister visited Northern Ireland to ascertain from all the parties the position in relation to the Northern Ireland protocol. Have you been notified that he is to come to this House to make a statement on those talks and discussions, so that we can make sure that the Northern Ireland protocol is ditched—that is No. 1—and know exactly what the Government's intentions are on this matter?

Mr Speaker: I can honestly say that nobody has been to me to say that they wish to come to this House, neither the Prime Minister nor anybody representing the Government. I am sure that through your good offices, you will not leave it at that. I am sure that you will pursue it, and your colleagues from Northern Ireland will do the same.

Debate on the Address

4TH DAY

Debate resumed (Order, 12 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.

Making Britain the Best Place to Grow Up and Grow Old

4.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):

It is a great honour for me to open this debate on the Loyal Address. In Her Majesty's jubilee year, I want to thank her for her dedication and service to our country, the Commonwealth and all its people. That includes young immigrants arriving on these shores, who feel her warmth and generosity; of course, some of them end up as her Ministers. I also thank Prince Charles and Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, for opening Parliament on her behalf.

During Her Majesty's 70-year reign, this country has been the best place in the world to grow up and grow old, yet during these seven decades the British people have overcome major challenges, time and time again. We have just lived through what I am sure you will agree has been an incredibly difficult period, Madam Deputy Speaker. After years of sacrifice by people up and down the country, this Queen's Speech focuses our attention exactly where it should be—on the future.

The future, full of promise, will not be without its challenges, both at home and overseas. Our country needed a Queen's Speech that rises to the scale of the challenge we face, and we have delivered it. Our communities needed a Queen's Speech that keeps them safe, secure and prosperous, and we will deliver it. Our constituents needed a Queen's Speech that shows them that the door of opportunity is always open to them, and we will deliver it. Our relentless focus is on delivery, delivery, delivery.

Before I outline how our legislative programme will make sure that this country remains the best place to grow up and grow old, I reaffirm this Government's solidarity with the people of Ukraine. I am pleased to say that all Ukrainian children and young people arriving in the United Kingdom have the right to access state education while in the UK. With memories of my own childhood, leaving Saddam Hussein's Iraq and building a new life here, I know how important education is to helping young people integrate into their new communities.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Secretary of State is absolutely right to say that there is no better place in the world to live than this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—always better together. Can he confirm that through the Government's policies and this Queen's Speech, every step will be

taken to ensure that every child in this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland achieves academic success; to improve the health system for every person who is on the waiting list; and to help every elderly person who depends on a better income for energy, food and heat?

Nadhim Zahawi: I think the hon. Gentleman speaks for the whole of Northern Ireland when he says that the focus has to be on the education, healthcare and public services that the people of Northern Ireland so badly need.

Not only do we need to make sure that Ukrainian refugees are well integrated, but we need to give them the same skills that we are giving our children, so that they can take on the challenges of the future.

Not only do we need to make sure that Ukrainian refugees are well integrated, but we need to give them the same skills that we are giving our children, so that they can take on the challenges of the future. I want to take this opportunity to commend schools and local authorities across England for rising to the challenge of welcoming and supporting children arriving from Ukraine, and offering thousands of them a school place, in the same schools that are at the heart of our plans to level up. One of the first Bills introduced this Session, in the other place, is the Schools Bill, which will deliver a stronger schools system that works for every child, no matter where they were born or live in our country. It will work alongside close to £5 billion of investment in our ambitious multi-year educational recovery plan, investing in what we know works: teacher training; tutoring; and extra educational opportunities, including of course extra hours for those who have the least time left in education—the 16 to 19-year-old students.

The evidence is clear that our plan is working and the recovery is happening, with primary pupils recovering about 0.1 months in reading and 0.9 months in maths since the summer. Combined with our £7 billion cash increase in the total core schools budget by 2024-25—this is compared not with 10 years ago but with 2021-22—this means we are giving schools the resources they need to focus on student outcomes. It is money that will help schools increase teachers' pay, including by delivering on our manifesto pledge of a £30,000 starting salary. This is money that will help schools deliver resources for students and meet inflationary pressures in these uncertain times.

However, there is more to do, because too many children leave primary school unable to meet the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics, despite the remarkable progress in the past decade. Through our Bill, 90% of primary school children will achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by 2030, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas, which need the most help, will have increased by more than a third. To meet our ambitious targets, the Schools Bill will go further, taking steps to make children safe and addressing standards in attendance, with this all underpinned by a fairer and stronger schools system. Because our best multi-academy trusts—those families of schools—are delivering improvement in schools and in areas where poor performance had become entrenched, by 2030 we want all schools either to be in a strong multi-academy trust or to have plans to join or form one.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): The Secretary of State is making a powerful point. Is he aware that in my area the strong Odyssey Trust for Education, which runs the successful Townley Grammar School for girls, is already ahead of the game on this one and has taken over the failing Erith School and made it King Henry School, and is determined to make it a great success?

Nadhim Zahawi: I certainly am aware of the Odyssey Trust for Education, and indeed it is exactly that passion for transforming young people's lives that we need on this journey; I know that that school and many other grammar schools—I believe it is 90 of the 165 grammar schools—have already joined those families of schools and will do the same.

Our ambitions are for all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, who may need additional support, to reach their potential. The SEND and alternative provision Green Paper, published in March, sets out our ambitions for children and young people with SEND. Our proposals will build a more inclusive and financially sustainable system that delivers the right support in the right place at the right time for every child and young person. We want to establish a new single national SEND and alternative provision system and are investing now to secure future sustainability for that system. We have also set out clear roles and responsibilities, and of course accountability measures, for everybody working in the SEND and alternative provision sector. That includes the new national and local inclusion dashboards to give a timely, transparent picture of how the system is performing across education, health and care, which is what parents have asked us to do.

Children and young people are the future of our country, but they cannot succeed if they are not safe and secure at home. That is why under my stewardship the Department for Education has been laser-focused on families. With strong families, we can make a fairer society, one in which children can escape the quicksand of disadvantage. With strong families, we can help to ensure that every child can grow up happy and of course with that vital opportunity. We are taking steps to strengthen families. We are funding 75 local authorities—half of England's local authorities—with the highest levels of child deprivation to create family hubs and transform that support for families. Our investment includes a focus on babies, children and families in the early years, with funding for breastfeeding, parenting and parent-infant mental health services. Where families need more help, we have expanded the supporting families programme so that up to 300,000 families with more complex needs can work with a key worker to help to resolve problems.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Safety is at the heart of what so many parents think of when they send their child into these settings, and I welcome the family help. Last week a child died in a nursery in my constituency, and I send my heartfelt condolences to the family. It must be a heartbreaking time. Ten years ago two other constituents lost their child, Millie, in a nursery. Dan and Joanne Thompson set up Millie's Trust in her name, and now Millie's Mark accredits staff in nurseries who have paediatric first aid training. Does my right hon. Friend agree that safety in nurseries and other

childcare settings is vital and that paediatric first aid is vital so that members of staff know how to deal with these emergencies? Would he join me in—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. A lot of speakers are trying to get into this debate, so interventions need to be very brief.

Nadhim Zahawi: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend on Millie's Mark, and of course child safety in nurseries is vital and non-negotiable. I am grateful to her for bringing that accreditation to the House's attention.

As I was saying, where families need additional help we have expanded the Supporting Families programme so that those 300,000 families with more complex needs can work with a key worker to help to resolve problems.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Nadhim Zahawi: I will just make a bit more headway, then I will take the hon. Lady's intervention with pleasure.

To improve the lives and outcomes of children with a social worker, we need to make fundamental changes to the current system. I look forward to seeing the recommendations from the independent review of children's social care—the MacAlister review—which will be published in the coming weeks. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve outcomes for children and families. This Government are acutely aware of how important childcare is to both children and their mums and dads. In each of the past three years we have spent in excess of £3.5 billion a year on our early education entitlements, and we will continue to support families with their childcare costs. At the spending review last October we announced additional funding for early years entitlements worth £160 million in 2022-23, £180 million in 2023-24 and £170 million in 2024-25 compared with the 2021-22 financial year.

Providing quality childcare is vital for children to develop from the earliest opportunity, but there is another point to all this. We know that women are the most likely to shoulder high childcare costs. The aim of the Government's universal credit childcare offer is to support parents for whom paid childcare is a barrier to work to overcome that barrier. This works alongside tax-free childcare, helping parents return to work and making sure it pays to work. For every £8 that parents pay into their childcare account, we add £2, up to a maximum of £2,000, in top-up per year for each child up to the age of 11, and up to £4,000 per disabled child until they are 17. Overall, the Government have spent more than £4 billion on childcare each year for the past five years in the United Kingdom through childcare offers led by the Department for Education, tax-free childcare and employer-supported childcare. Addressing the issue means that women can, if they wish, go back to their careers. That is fair to them and it is good for business and the economy.

Our long-term economic success will turn on our ability to nurture and utilise talent, including that of new mothers. Human potential—human capital—is the most important resource on earth. To steal a phrase from my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), the Chair of the Education Committee, we are determined to build a skills-rich economy. We

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

are committed to delivering those skills through massive investment in and reforms to skills and further education provision.

We have already embarked on revolutionising the post-16 education sector, transforming apprenticeships, driving up quality and better meeting the skills needs of employers through more flexible training models. We have launched T-levels, boosting access to high-quality technical education for thousands of young people, and, of course, creating our skilled workforce of the future. I pledge to the House that I will make T-levels as famous as A-levels—watch this space. In the previous parliamentary Session, we successfully passed the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 to do just that. That Act, alongside our wider reforms, including an additional £3.8 billion investment in skills over this Parliament, rightly places employers at the heart of the skills system, supporting our ambition for everyone to be able to access the training that they need to move into highly skilled jobs. There is, of course, a crucial role for our universities in making sure that our country remains the best place in which to grow up and, given the link to future earnings and opportunities, to grow old.

We will bring forward further legislation through a higher education reform Bill to ensure that our post-18 education system promotes real social mobility, is financially sustainable and will support people to get the skills they need to meet their career aspirations and help grow the economy.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for what he is saying, but will the Bill address the injustice that Muslim students face? At the moment, they cannot access student loans. Suitable loans were promised by David Cameron in 2014, and they are still waiting. Will he address that?

Nadhim Zahawi: I made that pledge to the Education Committee a few weeks ago. We are looking at how we deliver on that.

As I was saying, we will introduce further legislation through the higher education reform Bill to ensure that our post-18 education system promotes real social mobility and, as the hon. Lady has just said, is financially sustainable.

Alongside that, we are meeting our manifesto commitment to challenge any restriction of lawful speech and academic freedom. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will strengthen existing freedom of speech duties and will directly address gaps within the law, including the lack of a clear enforcement mechanism.

For both universities and technical education, one of the most important policies that we are implementing as part of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act is the paradigm shifting lifelong loan entitlement. A new and flexible skills system, it will provide people with an entitlement equivalent to four years of post-18 education, to be used over their lifetime in modules or as a whole, and is worth £37,000 in today's money. We are writing a new chapter—no, we are writing a new book in skills education. The entitlement will give people the ability to train, retrain and upskill in response to changes in skills needs and employment patterns. In a dynamic economy in which sectors can be crushed and reborn in double time, that has to be our priority.

The world is different now from how it was when I entered the world of work and business. It is different now compared with when I became an MP 12 years ago. We must not only keep up with a changing world but lead the change, and the Queen's Speech lays out how we will do that. As I said at the start of my speech, we are focused on delivering against the ambitious targets that we have set ourselves across skills, schools and families, and on holding ourselves to account against them. The sharing of our plans and performance data is a key lever to drive rapid improvement through the complex systems we oversee.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The Secretary of State talks about skills, which are so important. Does he recognise the real crisis we face with skills in the health service, and particularly the number of people we lack as regards the prevention and treatment of cancer? Will he and his friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who is sat next to him, consider the amendment on the Order Paper in my name, which calls for a strategy to tackle the cancer backlog? More than a third of my constituents with cancer are waiting more than two months for their first treatment.

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention and have a couple of things to say in response. First, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will address this, but I know that his priority—his laser-like focus—is on dealing with the backlog. There is also investment in Cumbria and the University of Cumbria for clinical training and the needs of the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

As I said at the start of my speech, I am focused on delivery. I am passionate in my belief that performance data is a key lever to drive rapid improvement through complex systems, whether in education or in health. On transparency, as we did with the vaccine we will do the same again with education and health. I have committed to publishing a delivery plan setting out what we will achieve and a performance dashboard showing progress so that the House and the country can hold us to account. I have already written to all schools stating that we will publish data on the uptake of the national tutoring programme this summer. Many schools have helpfully given us access to their attendance data, and I am conducting a trial over the coming weeks to share that data back in a way that prompts helpful actions in schools and local authorities.

The spirit with which our education sector responded to the pandemic demonstrated why this is the best country to grow up in.

Rachael Maskell: The Secretary of State is talking about the best place for young people to grow up; will he explain why not a single placement of special provision for children at risk is available throughout the country, as my constituent is experiencing right now?

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Lady raises an important point. That is partly why the MacAlister review of children's social care is so important. I shall say more on that in the coming weeks.

Let me return to praising the incredible spirit of our education frontline: those brilliant teachers, school leaders and, of course, support staff—we must never forget the support staff—demonstrated why this is the best country to grow up in. We see that spirit across our public and

private sector, including, of course, in the work of the national health service with our great vaccine companies, which has led the way in protecting lives and livelihoods in the battle against covid. Thanks to the astonishing roll-out of the vaccine and booster programmes, we were the first European nation to protect half our population with at least one dose and, thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the first major European nation to boost half our population, too.

Following the unprecedented challenges placed on the NHS by covid, we will spend more than £8 billion from 2022-23 to 2024-25, supported by the revenue from the health and social care levy, to clear the covid elective backlogs. But we must be honest: our NHS faces long-term challenges too, including an ageing population and people increasing living with multiple long-term conditions. At this critical moment, we must seize the opportunity to put our healthcare system on a more sustainable path for the future, while meeting the immediate urgent recovery challenges. The Health and Care Act 2022 has created the structures for that sustainable future.

At the same time, as my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will outline later, we will publish draft legislation to reform the Mental Health Act so that patients suffering from mental health conditions have greater control over their treatment and receive the dignity and respect that they deserve. I know that the NHS is an institution that makes people proud to be British. I and this entire Government share that sentiment, which is why we are safeguarding its sustainable future.

In closing, this was a Queen's Speech filled with substantial policies, not least those that give young people the education they need to succeed in life; policies that will provide more rungs on the ladder of opportunity, and opportunity for older people who want a chance to learn and retrain; policies that put skills at the heart of our economy to unleash its potential; policies that back our public services so that they can deliver what our country needs; policies that sustain the truth that this is the best place in the world to grow up and grow old.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before I call the shadow Secretary of State, it will be obvious that a large number of Members wish to participate in the debate. I will not impose a time limit at the start, but I expect Members to speak for a maximum of five minutes.

4.57 pm

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in today's debate on behalf of the Opposition, and to set out the contrast between a Conservative Government who have spent 12 long years failing Britain and a Labour party determined to make our country the best place to grow up and grow old.

As the Leader of the Opposition set out last week, at the heart of the Government's programme there is a poverty of ambition for our public services, entirely inadequate for the challenges we face. We see that in the Government's ongoing refusal to commit to a children's recovery plan to support children after the disruption of the pandemic on anything like the scale that either their

adviser, Sir Kevan Collins, or the Labour party has set out. I remain disappointed but sadly not surprised. After all, this is the Government who reopened the pubs before they reopened schools.

Twelve years in and the Conservatives are out of ideas, out of touch and out of steam. The challenges we face as a country demand vision, leadership, energy, drive and determination. Of course there are the challenges that every country faces, and now there are the challenges bequeathed by the pandemic and its legacy. But there are also the challenges brought by 12 years of Conservative failure, and what they all have in common is that every single one of them is a challenge from which this Government flinch.

A generation of children have been through the education system in this country under Conservative Governments since 2010. Their experience is the core narrative of this Government's failure: not simply a failure to deliver, but a failure to think, a failure to plan, a failure to resource and a failure to learn. I think of what a child starting school in 2010 will have seen in that time: real-terms cuts to funding per pupil; secondary school classes at their largest for a generation; hundreds of thousands more children eligible for free school meals; school building repairs cancelled or postponed; hundreds of days lost to the pandemic; botched examinations not for one year, but two; and now this historic failure to invest in the children's recovery plan that the Government's own expert recommended and that our children desperately need.

The only thing on the up under this Government is child poverty. Now, as that young person looks ahead to university and the years that follow, they can see higher costs than ever before, stretching almost to retirement.

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for drawing comparisons with what it is like to go to school under a Conservative Government. I went to school under a Labour Government. When I left my secondary school in 2005, it had a pass rate of 11% and one in three teachers were supply teachers. Was that not the real legacy of a Labour Government: a failed generation?

Bridget Phillipson: The last Labour Government transformed the life chances of people across our country—child poverty down, investment in our schools, schools rebuilt, teachers properly supported. That is a record of which we are very proud.

This is a generation of children let down from primary school right the way through to university, a generation of children failed by the Conservatives. I can tell you why they have been failed. The Government have stopped thinking in terms of children, people, parents and families. They have been too long in power, and they are mistaking changing institutions and regulations for improving the lives of our people.

Look at the Schools Bill, published last week. I had genuinely hoped for better, but what did we find? It is narrow in scope, hollow in ambition and thin on policy. It has 32 clauses on the governance of academies and 15 on funding arrangements. On funding, what a sorry sight it is to see a Conservative Chancellor and Secretary of State seeking plaudits merely for aiming to restore, by 2024, a level of real-terms school funding achieved by the last Labour Government, when their Government have spent a decade slicing it away.

[Bridget Phillipson]

The newspapers this weekend made it all too clear that whichever children the Secretary of State cares about, they are not always the children in England's state schools.

We learnt that he is concerned that the success of our young people in accessing their first choice universities from England's state schools—the schools which the vast majority of children attend and for which he is primarily responsible—is evidence of “tilting the system” away from private schools, of which, he tells us, he is “so proud”. What an extraordinary remark by the Secretary of State for Education about the success of students in state schools in this country.

If that were not enough, the next day brought further clarification. Not only does the Secretary of State appear concerned by the growing success of state-educated children in entering the universities of their choice, he is not bothered that their schools are crumbling around them. His own officials, within the last two months, have said:

“Some sites a risk-to-life, too many costly and energy-inefficient repairs rather than rebuilds, and rebuild demand three times supply”.

Children are being educated in schools that are a risk to life, and the Government have not lifted a finger.

The children of this country are being failed by an Education Secretary more interested in appealing to Conservative party members than in ensuring the success of our young people.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The hon. Lady has made two points in the last few minutes about school funding for buildings and about children from private schools. May I address both? Does the hon. Lady welcome the more than £1 million given to Carre's Grammar School in Sleaford to improve the school buildings and facilities? I went to a comprehensive school in Middlesbrough until I was 16. Just before I was 16 I was on a walk in the hills when I met somebody who went to Gordonstoun, a brilliant public school. They gave me, an ordinary working-class girl from Middlesbrough, a scholarship, for which I am eternally grateful. Were I to have applied for Oxford University, should I have been penalised for that scholarship?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I emphasise that interventions should be brief.

Bridget Phillipson: I am afraid that I did not catch most of that intervention—it was a bit hard to hear the hon. Lady—but I repeat that the last Labour Government rebuilt schools across our country. That has not been the record of the last 12 years.

The next Labour Government will build a Britain where children come first, where we put children and growing up at the heart of how we think about the future of our country, where Britain is the best place to grow up and the best place to grow old, and where young people leave education ready for work and ready for life.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Since we are all talking about when we were at school, I should point out that I am probably the only Member of the House who grew up under a Tory Government and was

at school in 2010. Does my hon. Friend agree that the reality of that was class sizes that were the biggest on record and school buildings that were falling apart, and, with education maintenance allowance having been cut, all we had to look forward to was the prospect of paying £9,000 a year in tuition fees if we went to university?

Bridget Phillipson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The last Labour Government transformed the life chances of a generation, and it will fall to the next Labour Government to do the same. Because, in a country where we think about children as both a society and an economy of the future, we build a better Britain for everyone: a Britain of children and families where the Government work to enable and empower success and, in particular, a Britain in which the Government see the soaring cost of childcare not as a statistic to be observed but a problem to be solved. That cost is crippling: families suffer financially; children suffer socially, and our country suffers economically. When the cost of childcare, not just for our two to four-year-olds, but the whole time from the end of maternity leave to the start of secondary school—from ensuring that parents can choose, and afford, to go back to work, to affordable breakfast clubs and afterschool activities so that parents do not always need to be at the school gate—is quite literally pricing people out of parenting, children and families are being failed.

That failure is not just about the individual children and families whom the Government fail, though there are millions of them and that is bad enough; our whole country is failed when we let our children down. It is not just childcare. We see it too in the Government's failure to face up to the damage that their mishandling of the pandemic did to the education of a generation. The Secretary of State's failure to convince the Chancellor to invest properly in children's recovery from the pandemic; his failure at the last spending round in the autumn; his failure in the spring statement, and his failure now—that series of failures—above all he does or says now or in the future, is what he will be remembered for. The Prime Minister's own adviser had the dignity to resign rather than accept such failure, and Labour would have been very different from the Government.

We have a plan where the Government have failure. On the very day that schools and nurseries closed to most children in March 2020, a Labour Government would have started work on three plans: an immediate plan to support children's learning and development remotely and as fully as possible while lockdown went on; an urgent plan to reopen schools safely and quickly, and then to keep them open so children could learn together and play together; and, critically, a plan to ensure that when lockdown ended, children's education and wellbeing did not suffer in the long run. Our children's recovery plan put children and their futures at the heart of how we think about moving on from the pandemic because, after all, every child in Britain did more to follow the covid rules than our Prime Minister. The impact that had on their health and educational attainment needs addressing, not ignoring.

We would introduce breakfast clubs so that every child starts their day with a proper meal; afterschool activities, so that every child gets to learn and experience art, music, drama and sport; mental health support because every report that we see tells us that children's

development has fallen behind in the pandemic; continued professional development for our teachers because every child deserves teachers second to none in support of their learning; and targeted extra investment right from the early years through to further education, to support the children at risk of falling behind, because attainment gaps open up early and need tackling early.

We would go further to lock in the gains of a recovery programme for the long term, with a national excellence programme to drive up standards in schools, because every child deserves to go to a school with high expectations and high achievements. There would be thousands upon thousands of new teachers in subjects that have shortages right now, because every child deserves to be taught maths and physics by people who love their subject and to be introduced to a love of sport, music, art and drama; a skills commission, because every young person needs to leave education ready for work and ready for life; careers guidance in every school and work experience for every child, because each of us deserves to succeed at work, and Labour believes that the Government have a role to play in making that happen; and a curriculum in which we teach our children not just the past that they will inherit, but the future they will build, and in which they learn about the challenge of net zero and the climate emergency that we face.

It is precisely because we have a plan that we would enable our education system to deliver it. It is why we want an approach to how our schools are run that focuses on how children achieve and thrive, not the name on the uniform or the hours that they are there. It is why we have a determination to see childcare not as a passing, costly phase in the lives of others, but as the foundation of opportunity in the lives of every child and every parent.

As our children grow and as they interact more and more with my party's proudest achievement to date, the national health service, it is sadly not the case that their experience of this Government's record on public services improves. With health, as with education, there was a decade of failure even before the pandemic began. The national health service did not go into the pandemic strong, well-resourced and resilient. No, the NHS went into the pandemic with record waiting lists, 100,000 vacancies and 17,000 fewer beds than in 2010. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) has rightly said:

"It is not just that the Government did not fix the roof while the sun was shining; they dismantled the roof and removed the floorboards."—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 954.]

Last autumn, the Government announced that they would raise tax to fund clearing the backlog and improving social care. The tax rise is happening during a cost of living crisis, sure enough, but it is not clear how they will manage the rest. That is why today, in our health service as in childcare, we are paying more but getting less. The Government are raising taxes on working people in the middle of a cost of living crisis, yet patients are expected to wait longer for care.

Conservative Members would do well to remember that NHS waiting lists are at a record 6 million. Ministers cannot blame the pandemic, because the figure was already at over 4 million before covid struck. Let us think of those millions of people waiting—waiting longer than ever before, often waiting in pain and

discomfort, waiting while working or trying to find work, waiting while walking their children to school, waiting while trying to find somewhere affordable to live, waiting while looking after their grandchildren. They are waiting at a cost to themselves, of course, but at an astronomical cost to our country that is not just financial, but economic and social. They are waiting for their Government to give our public services the priority they deserve.

Mental health services are on the brink of collapse. In 12 years of Conservative Governments, a quarter of mental health beds have been cut, and right now 1.6 million people are waiting for mental health treatment. How on earth can any Minister defend that record? The Government's approach to social care is up there with their failure on childcare: it is not fair, and it will not work. The less people have, the more they will take. Those with homes worth £150,000 will lose almost everything, while the wealthiest are protected.

It does not need to be this way. Labour will build an NHS fit for the future and get patients seen on time. We will provide the NHS with the staff, equipment and modern technology required so that the NHS is there for people when they need it. We will fix social care so that those in need do not go without. Our new deal for care workers will provide fair pay and secure contracts to plug the more than 100,000 vacancies in social care. We will transform training to improve standards of care. Across our public services, Labour will build a better Britain. We have done it before; we will do it again.

I remember a previous Conservative Government who cared little for the challenges that my family faced—a Government keener on judging my family than on supporting it. Then I saw, growing up and as a young woman, the difference that an incoming Labour Government made. I saw a Government who acted decisively to tackle disadvantage, cut child poverty and support families and children. A generation grew up with Sure Start and with children's centres. A generation like me were supported after 16 with the education maintenance allowance and a level of investment in our NHS unmatched in history, with waiting lists driven down from months and years to days and weeks. I saw then, in my own community, the difference those changes made, and I still see it now in the better lives of young people who grew up with that advantage and the support it unlocked.

For 12 long years, Conservative Ministers have failed a generation of our children. Labour in power will be different, because we see Britain as its people—our children, our families, our future—and we will never swerve from making this country the best place to grow up and the best place to grow old.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Nominations closed at 5 o'clock this afternoon for candidates for the post of Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. One nomination has been received. A ballot will therefore not be held. I congratulate Ian Mearns on his re-election as Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

I remind hon. and right hon. Members of my stricture about sticking to five minutes, at least for the opening contributions from the Back Benches.

5.15 pm

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in support of this Queen's Speech. It is tempting to respond to a number of the points made by the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson), whose speech sounded remarkably like a bid for the leadership of the Labour party. However, given the lack of time, I want to concentrate on just four Bills, all of which emanate from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and all of which I had a small hand in part of the preparation of.

The first is a carry-over—the Online Safety Bill. I welcome this opportunity to speak on it because I had only five minutes do so on Second Reading, although I will have rather less this time. I reiterate that the Bill is tremendously important and will protect our young people as they grow up. It is pioneering legislation to introduce some regulation of online activity.

We also have an ambition in this country to be the technological leaders of the world, so I remain concerned that the Bill is very vague in a lot of aspects. Since Second Reading, I have had meetings with mid-sized platforms such as Pinterest, Reddit, Eventbrite and Tripadvisor, all of which are committed to this country but concerned that, while they want to comply with the provisions of the Bill, it is not clear to them what those provisions are going to undertake. I again say to the Government that what is important is to protect people who are at risk, not necessarily just regulate every large platform because of their reach.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Whittingdale: No, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, as I am under a lot of pressure to keep this short.

The second Bill is the media Bill, which is vital for the future of public service broadcasting in this country. A lot of attention will be given to the provisions on Channel 4, which I welcome, although it is important that we debate those and discuss the model that Channel 4 should operate in future. The Bill contains other important provisions. The prominence of public service broadcasters has been argued for by ITV, Channel 4 and the BBC for many years, and it is essential if we are to protect public service broadcasters and ensure that they are visible in a world where competing channels are increasing in number almost every week.

In support of commercial public service broadcasters, I welcome the absence from the Queen's Speech of a Bill to introduce advertising bans for HFSS—high in fat, salt or sugar—foods before 9 pm. I support the Government's wish to reduce obesity, but I firmly believe that an advertising ban would have no effect on that and, at the same time, would massively affect commercial broadcasters.

I regret the absence from the Bill of provisions for radio prominence. This was an important part of the outcome of the digital radio and audio review. The Government accepted the recommendations from that but they seem to have dropped out of the Bill. I hope that we might try to correct that during its passage.

I look forward to the inclusion in the Bill of the repeal of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, which is a sword of Damocles hanging over a free press

allowing a future Government to impose punitive costs unless they sign up to the Government's version of regulation. The removal of that was in the Conservative manifesto and I very much hope that we will fulfil that manifesto commitment in that Bill.

The third Bill is the digital markets and competition Bill, which, if anything, is even more important to the freedom of the press. At the moment, the press are at a disadvantage in their negotiations with the big platforms such as Facebook and Google, which take their content and decide how much, if anything, they are going to pay for it. The digital markets unit is being established to address that, but it needs to be put on a statutory basis; it needs to be underpinned by law. I therefore welcome the provision in the Queen's Speech for a draft Bill but hope the Government will move forward to implement that legislation as soon as possible.

Finally, I turn to a Bill I again played some role in: the data Bill. One of the great opportunities from Britain taking back control of its own laws is our ability to write our own data protection laws. Of course we want to ensure that people's privacy is protected, but at the same time the existing rules have acted as a disincentive. They are overburdensome and not properly understood by large numbers of small firms in particular. This is a real opportunity to have a modern data protection regime which others across the world will admire and follow.

On that basis, I am delighted to support the Queen's Speech.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call SNP spokesperson Carol Monaghan.

5.21 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): In this Queen's Speech, I would have expected to see some radical interventions that are urgently needed to tackle the cost of living crisis, to tackle climate change and to properly support our elderly community, including elderly veterans, but there is a real lack of ambition in the speech, and this Government have done the absolute opposite of making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old. While they have lined the pockets of their cronies, they have limited the opportunities of young people. They have caused and then ignored the cost of living crisis, which has left many children and elderly without enough to get by, and delayed action on climate change, which arguably will have the biggest impact on our younger generations.

For us in Scotland, this is a tale of two Governments. The Scottish Government are determined to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up and grow old, regardless of household income or social demographic, but only as an independent nation will Scotland have the levers, the decision-making powers and the full fiscal autonomy to see that ambition fully realised. *[Interruption.]* There is heckling from those on the Government Benches. I would have thought that the results of the elections two weeks ago would have shown them something—perhaps they would have learned some lessons. People in Scotland more and more are waking up to this.

Let us compare the two Governments. A woman in Scotland who is expecting a child is given a baby box filled with essentials for her baby—clothes, books, teething

toys, blankets. The message is clear: your baby is important, your baby is valued and your baby is welcomed. At the same time as the baby box was introduced in Scotland, the UK Government introduced a two-child limit on child tax credit and universal credit. It is apparently okay to have up to two children. Beyond that if you are a low-income household your baby is neither welcomed nor valued by this Tory Government.

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service said that over half the women it surveyed who had an abortion in the coronavirus pandemic and knew of the two-child limit said that that policy was important in their decision-making around whether to continue the pregnancy. That is pretty damning evidence. It is no surprise that, since 2016—since mothers have been expecting babies who would be born after that policy came into force—there has been a sharp increase in the number of abortions. Women are choosing abortions because they cannot afford to have a baby. The best place to grow up?

In Scotland, the Scottish Government have introduced the Scottish child payment—£20 a week for every eligible child and that will be rising to £25 a week—and that is mitigating some of the worst impacts for families. Frankly, the progressive policies of the Scottish Government must be matched with similar interventions from Westminster.

Last week, we were treated to the comments of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), who said that people were only using food banks because “they cannot budget” and

“cannot cook a meal from scratch.”—[*Official Report*, 11 May 2022; Vol. 714, c. 185.]

Today, Gareth Mason, head chef at Absolute Bar & Bistro in Westhoughton, has said that the hon. Member’s comments were “tone deaf” and “insulting”. He has set about proving this by cooking seven everyday meals, such as spaghetti Napoli, beans on toast, baked potato—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Can I just check that the hon. Lady has informed the hon. Gentleman that she was going to refer to him? That is perhaps just a reminder that that is what she would do.

Carol Monaghan: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have not. I was not making a point of order; I was referring to something that was said in a debate and has been said in the press.

The chef, Gareth Mason, said:

“I’ve come to the conclusion it’s a load of rubbish. These meals I’ve done, as soon as you put any protein or dairy into them, it’s not feasible to do it for 30p. If you eat beans on toast for every meal, it might work, but even if you did cheese on toast, the cost of cheese would be more than 30p on its own”,

and that is before considering the cooking cost of the food.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) was very clear that he offered anyone on the Opposition Benches to go and join him down in Ashfield. Given the problems the hon. Member has outlined, is she planning on going down to see what happens in Ashfield and how that food bank functions?

Carol Monaghan: I would love to do that, but more than that, I look forward to the cooking book from the hon. Member for Ashfield, because I am sure that will be a really popular volume. I will even buy some copies for my own food bank if we think we can be making meals for 30p a day—incredible!

The fact is that people on low income or on benefits are far superior with managing their finances because they have to be. According to Jack Monroe, the bootstrap cook who gave evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee, the impact of the cost of living crisis on “millions of children living in poverty in Britain today”

is

“going to be, in some cases, fatal”.

This is first and foremost due to the rise in the cost of everyday essentials, not because families on low incomes cannot budget or cannot cook a meal from scratch.

But it gets worse. The Minister for safeguarding—the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean)—said on Sky News today that people struggling with the cost of living should just “take on more hours” or “get a better-paid job”. This shows how detached this Government are from the lived reality of so many people in our communities that we represent. Hunger impacts on the ability of children to learn. As one Member has said, they cannot concentrate and they cannot think. I know of teachers who are keeping cereal bars and snacks in their desk drawers to give to children to make sure they have something in their tummies.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State talked about extracurricular activities, and I think every Member here understands the importance of these. But for families who are just about managing—they are just about managing to pay bills and to feed their children—the things that will go are the little extras. These are the sports clubs, the activities, the birthday parties, the days out, the holidays—in fact, all the little things that together make childhood so special, and that enrich their experience and their ambitions.

It is good to hear the Secretary of State also talk today about the importance of teachers. As a former teacher myself, I know the difference that good teachers can make to young people. It is good to hear him talking about his ambition to make the starting salary for teachers £30,000 a year. That will only be £3,000 below what Scottish teachers currently start out on, with £33,000 a year.

In Scotland, we want to create a more equal society. One way we aim to do that is through widening, rather than restricting, the opportunities for our young people once they leave school. The Scottish Government’s young person’s guarantee ensures that every young person from 16 to 24 has a chance to go to university or college with no tuition fees, or has a chance to secure an apprenticeship or high-quality job. It is significant that, of anywhere in the UK, Scotland has the highest proportion of young people with positive destinations post school.

Time and again, we see this Tory Government undermining progress towards a better society for our young people. They talk of untapping aspiration, yet just a couple of weeks ago the chair of their Social Mobility Commission said that fewer girls than boys are studying physics because they dislike “hard maths.”

[Carol Monaghan]

That perpetuates outdated and harmful gender stereotypes about girls, particularly in science, technology, engineering and maths, which is close to my heart. That is no way to untap aspiration or ambition.

Students in England are considering their career and whether they are willing to take on a lifetime of debt. The Government's equality analysis found that their student finance reforms will likely have a negative impact on graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, while benefiting those who are already more privileged. The reforms will not, in fact, increase social mobility. This Government are making policy decisions that will hinder opportunity, to the obvious detriment of so many young people.

I could talk about Brexit and our lack of mobility across Europe, and about the international collaborations that have been lost, but I want to speak a little about our elderly community. According to the Centre for Ageing Better, one in five pensioners—more than 2 million people—is living in relative poverty. Worse than that, many are living in abject poverty. This represents an increase of more than 200,000 in just the last 12 months, and the problem will only get worse.

The report also presents a stark picture of up to a 10-year difference in lifespan between wealthy pensioners and poor pensioners. Pensioners have been abandoned by this Government, who scrapped the pension triple lock. Pensioners will be among the hardest hit by the rising cost of living; some already have to resort to spending the day on buses or eating one meal a day just to keep warm, as we heard last week. "The best place to grow old"?

Many UK citizens abroad, including a significant number of veterans, are living in poverty because of the freeze in overseas pensions. Their pension is frozen at the point at which they moved. Countries such as Canada have formally requested a reciprocal arrangement to cover pension uprating, but this UK Government have declined.

Our pensioners include veterans who have given the very best of themselves through their service. We have a duty of care to them, and I will talk briefly about one particular group that I know has support from both sides of the House—the nuclear test veterans. Their numbers are dwindling and they have had a lifetime of health issues, yet they have received neither a medal, recognition nor compensation. This is the only country not to have compensated its nuclear test veterans. Surely we can do better for this small group.

The SNP Scottish Government are doing what they can to support households during these difficult times—fully mitigating the bedroom tax; mitigating council tax; doubling the Scottish child payment; providing free tuition, free prescriptions and free school meals for all primary schoolchildren—but just as Scotland tries to mitigate the worst excesses of this Tory Government, the Scottish Government are suffering from budget cuts by them. A lack of powers for the Scottish Government means that we can only really deal with things around the edge—with the symptoms of poverty, not the deep-rooted causes of inequality in our society that deliver child poverty and pension poverty. Only with full independence can we realise our ambition for our children, our young people and our pensioners.

5.35 pm

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in support of the Queen's Speech. In this debate on making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old in, I will focus on education. I appreciate, however, that inflation and the cost of living are top priorities for my constituents at this time. The Government need to do more to alleviate the consequences of rising prices, and I believe that they will.

The UK is, and always has been, one of the best places to grow up in, and I am convinced that it remains a great place for those of all ages to live in. Through education and the opportunities that it gives, and especially through great state schools and teachers, people from my background have been fortunate enough to reach our potential. However, despite the fantastic opportunities, and the increase in finance that the Government have put into our education system, a number of issues still need to be addressed, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is determined to tackle them. We congratulate him on his March White Paper. I know that he aims to improve standards and achievement. I look forward to participating in debates on the schools Bill when it comes to the House.

I have worked as both a teacher and a lecturer, so I know how vital it is that every child receives the best possible education. Education and social mobility have always been key political issues for me, and I passionately believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life. I am a strong supporter of lifetime learning. Education is not just for the young, but for all age groups, particularly at a time when the world is changing rapidly.

As we all know, parents are a child's primary educator. A parent's education level has a significant impact on their children's success and can significantly affect opportunities later in life. However, talent and hard work alone should determine how far people can go, whoever they are, wherever they come from, whatever their background. Opportunity is key, and this Government believe passionately in opportunity. I believe that talent is widespread across our nation. Unfortunately, there are certain groups and areas where opportunity is not open to all, for many and varied reasons, so fair funding, accountability, a safe environment and attendance are vital. I look forward to further debates on the Bill.

In my Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency, we are very fortunate to have a diverse and fantastic collection of schools at primary and secondary level. The borough is a social mobility hotspot, and a wide variety of education offerings are available, including church, grammar, comprehensive and single-sex schools, all of which achieve good results and give young people excellent opportunities to develop their talents. Children from across Bexley, from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, achieve great results at school and benefit from the wide range of opportunities.

We have an excellent local further education provider—the Bexley campus of London South East Colleges—that offers a wide range of choices and courses. When I visited recently, I particularly enjoyed the media and special needs facilities. Last week, I also visited Woodside Academy, a special school that supports children from the age of four to 19 with a wide range of learning difficulties. It is part of the London South East Academies

trust, and is another example of working together. It does innovative work to support the children under its care, both with their education and with wider health concerns. I watched, listened and learned about their specialist eye testing on site. The trust's chief executive, Dr Sam Parrett OBE, and her team are doing a superb job.

However, even in areas such as Bexley, where we are making great progress, more can always be done. I recently visited Bedonwell School with my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) and the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare). It has outstanding special educational needs provision, but it highlighted concerns about SEN funding. I have written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the concerns it raised during our visit.

The Schools Bill will make it easier for schools in England to join multi-academy trusts, strengthen the regulatory framework, reform the schools funding formula to make it fairer, and strengthen the school attendance regime so that children can benefit from being in school. Those are vital issues, which is why I strongly support what the Government are doing. Madam Deputy Speaker insists that I keep to five minutes, so I cannot talk about the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, which is also great news. I think we all agree with it on the Conservative Benches, so I do not have to go into detail on it.

To conclude, by levelling up skills and education, we not only help to unleash the potential of every area in our United Kingdom, but grow the economy and boost our GDP. There is a clear theme from the Queen's Speech that needs to be promoted loud and clear: the Conservative Government believe in social mobility, opportunity and an education system that offers the best to all, so that every individual can maximise their life chances.

5.40 pm

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am delighted to speak in this Queen's Speech debate on making Britain the best place in which to grow up and grow old. I want to focus on what my part of the country needs if we are to meet our full potential to contribute to future national prosperity, and to ensure that the people of Hull and the rest of the United Kingdom do not just survive but thrive, with strong public services and opportunities for all.

It is 12 years since the coalition Government talked of rebalancing the economy and boosting UK economic growth by taking pressure off the congested south-east. It is 10 years since Lord Heseltine's 2012 "No Stone Unturned" report, eight years since the northern powerhouse was launched, and three years since the Prime Minister took office and re-badged the idea as levelling up. Levelling up was only recently defined in the White Paper. After 12 years, we now have 12 missions.

We all know that a growing UK economy is the key to improving standards of living, ending poverty and having well-funded public services, but we are stuck with low productivity, low growth, high inflation and high taxes. Escaping that requires a major contribution from the Humber. Hull is a freeport city with a multi-sector industrial base; it has the UK's fastest-growing digital economy, a strong local arts sector and a great university.

New maritime industries are expanding around the green energy estuary, and there are opportunities for growth, ending fuel poverty and energy security.

However, alongside those success stories, Hull has setbacks. Local unemployment remains above the national average. Hull is usually in the top five areas in the UK for deprivation. In-work poverty weakened our local economy even before the austerity decade and the cost of living crisis. Hull needs more skilled, higher-paid jobs. The Minister doing the media round this morning seems to think that those jobs are shared equally around the country, but sadly they are not. Hull has several of the 225 left-behind neighbourhoods, where physical and mental health outcomes lag considerably behind those in wealthier areas.

Raising educational standards in Hull has been challenging. Too many local youngsters are not in education, employment or training. Many of our brightest feel the need to leave to get on. Like many left behind areas, over the past decade Hull has lost not just shops, but banks, pubs, youth clubs, churches, children's centres, police stations and post offices. Access to GPs and NHS dentists is worsening. Hull has, however, gained food banks, gambling outlets, junk food sellers and loan sharks.

Opportunities to bid for the community wealth fund will hopefully help to repair some of our depleted social infrastructure, but so far, the talk about levelling up has been unmatched by deeds. Independent research from Bloomberg and others shows that levelling up has barely started for most of the north. Indeed, the gap between it and the south-east has grown over the past decade, including, most shamefully, when it comes to life expectancy. The excuses for failure do not convince my constituents. Of course, covid and Ukraine have been economic shocks, but Ministers presented Brexit as an opportunity to boost levelling up, not another excuse for failing. We also know that crisis can create opportunities, as happened in 1945. Hull has received some levelling-up funding for our city centre sites, but it is a small proportion of the funding package required to turbocharge our regional economy, and it is nowhere near the sustained public and private investment that has transformed the London docklands over the past 40 years. It does not even replace funding lost since 2010. I always fight in this place for the people of Hull, but a fair share of not very much will not be transformative in boosting UK economic growth and increasing the opportunities that we all want to see for the people of this wonderful country.

Hull's digital connectivity is good, but our poor road and rail connectivity hold back economic regeneration. The Government's integrated rail plan delivers no genuine transport levelling up. Another obstacle to Hull's progress has been Ministers' insistence—behind the guise of devolution—on permanent, made-in-Whitehall changes in political structures, without proper local consultation, as a precondition for funding. I draw attention to the fact that London never had to make such changes before getting schemes such as Crossrail. The ambition must be to transform, not tinker. We must go beyond the rhetoric of a Medici-style renaissance—or a Victor Meldrew charter to level down next door's conservatory.

The whole country needs a levelling-up Bill that is bold, lifting the dead hand of Whitehall bureaucracy, cutting waste and boosting investment. Only failure is unaffordable for our country.

5.46 pm

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), who represents an exciting area of the country on the Humber. Thurrock may be in the south-east, but I share her exasperation about London-centric policy making, which has gone back decades. In that sense, we should welcome the commitment to levelling up, although she set quite a high bar for proving what it means in practice. I share some of the concerns that she has expressed. When I look at my local road infrastructure in Thurrock, I can see that a national approach has not served us especially well. We must make sure that levelling up really means something in practice.

We are talking today about making this country the best place to grow up and grow old, and it is the greatest country in the world. When I look at what is happening around the world, I think, “Aren’t we lucky to be here in the United Kingdom?” When I read our newspapers, watch our TV or listen to Opposition Members, I often think that this country is much better than they say it is, and that should be celebrated. That is not to say that we cannot do better and there are not challenges that need to be addressed.

In this place, we talk too often about how much we are spending on solving a problem, rather than about the outcomes that we are trying to deliver. Success is not measured by how much we spend; if we try to measure it in that way, we end up with a very short-term approach that does not fix the problem. That is why we end up having the same debates over and over again.

One area I want to highlight in that regard is social care. For the last 10 years, we have been obsessing about how we pay for social care, without properly looking at how we design a social care system that is fit for purpose. The challenge is that we are all living longer, and we have not revisited our systems and policies to address that. We need a life course approach to our housing. We know that falls are the biggest source of elderly ill health, so why are we not doing more to incentivise people to approach how they live in a way that suits their new length of life?

We also need to give younger people hope that they will be able to buy their own home, and this is where the two policies come together. Too often, we look at policies in silos. Why are we not encouraging people to make better use of their housing assets for their whole family? We can incentivise granny annexes, and we can give young people some hope by ensuring they have greater access to the wealth in their parents’ home. If we can do that, we will save money in the health service, because unnecessary hospital stays are much more expensive than dealing with a little inheritance tax problem, which might unlock some investment.

Housing is a big challenge, and we need some radical approaches to it. Council housing is a big part of it, and we must have a Macmillanesque expansion of our housing supply. We can deal with that by having fixed-term tenancies, to make sure that we are giving the most help to those most need it and not having homes being stuck.

I also wish to say something more widely about health, because I have always said that government perhaps works too well for the pointy-elbowed middle classes who are good at fighting for their interests and not for those who most need it. In that respect, I am

disappointed that we have not made more progress with reform of the Mental Health Act 1983. It is now four years since Sir Simon Wessely brought forward his review. We spent a great deal of time consulting users, who often had to relive their own trauma in order to give us their advice. So we have really let those people down in delivering material change. We know that deprivation of liberty can be an important part of looking after people with severe mental ill health, but we also know that it is misused, as Sir Simon Wessely’s report shows.

I have little time left, but I wish to highlight a couple more things we need to properly address in that regard. We are still using the Bail Act 1976 to remand people in custody for their own protection. The criminal justice system should not be the place where we deal with people with severe mental ill health; in 21st-century Britain, that is completely unacceptable. We have made much of acting to remove prison cells and police cells as places of safety, and I assumed that we were making considerable progress on that—I thought that this was used in a very limited way. So I was horrified to hear from Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons that in the three women’s prisons it visited last year 68 women had been remanded for their own protection. That is not acceptable and I want more speed in dealing with it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I now call Paulette Hamilton to make her maiden speech.

5.51 pm

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Today I stand, Madam Deputy Speaker, to thank you for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price).

I can only say how proud I am today to be a Brummie. I am overwhelmed but privileged to be standing here today in this great institution. Being elected to Parliament is not a right; it is an honour, and it is an even greater honour knowing that my community voted for me to be here.

When I was elected on 4 March, people found it difficult to understand that I was the first female to be elected for the Erdington constituency. They were even more shocked to learn that I was the first person of African and Caribbean descent to be elected as a Member of Parliament in Birmingham. I hope the constituency shares my pride in knowing that they have made history.

In saying that, I cannot go any further without talking about the late, great Jack Dromey MP. Jack was elected in May 2010 and worked relentlessly to serve our community. He said in Parliament, and often within the constituency:

“Erdington may be rich in talent, but it is one of the poorest constituencies in the country.”—[*Official Report*, 15 September 2021; Vol. 700, c. 984.]

Until his death he worked to support his constituency, in so many ways. Any job lost in the area was a personal blow to Jack. The many tributes that have been made to him in this place and in the community show how much he is deeply missed.

I grew up in Handsworth, in the neighbouring constituency of Perry Barr, but Erdington is the place I have called home for 35 years. Over 103,000 people live in the constituency, and we have a diverse community:

26% are BME people, and over 69% are under the age of 45. Some families, sadly, have not worked for three generations. It is important to get those people back to work. We need to invest, instil confidence, give opportunity and build aspiration into our young people.

I am looking forward to being involved in debates relating to people living with mental health issues. Serving as the mental health champion for Birmingham City Council—the first ever to be elected—I have seen at first hand the increase in the number of people living with mental health issues, and the massive increase, since the pandemic, in the number of young people living with severe and enduring mental illnesses. The funding in this area has been cut, and it does need to be increased, as mental health services are struggling to access adequate in-patient beds when they are needed.

In Erdington, the community has also seen an alarming increase in the number of houses in multiple occupation. We have the second highest number in the city. My constituency needs to see an urgent change in legislation to ensure that poor, unscrupulous landlords are punished, fined and removed from the market if they fail to comply with the rules that are designed to protect residents. These are just some of the many issues that I will be raising on behalf of my constituency, as I heard about them time and time again while out campaigning.

My children were born in Erdington—some of them are up in the Public Gallery—and they went to Erdington schools, of which we have over 40 in my constituency. I have 40 schools to visit, and I promise I will be visiting all of them. I know I will feel at home when I do, because arriving in Parliament after a by-election has truly made me feel like the new girl at school.

My husband opened his first shop on the Slade Road in the late 1980s, in an area where the high street was dying, so as a family we were acutely aware of the difficulties that other small businesses were experiencing back then. At the same time, I trained as a nurse and worked at the local health centre in Warren Farm Road, Kingstanding, for several years. My career in the health service lasted for over 25 years, and it has truly shaped my political career.

As I have already noted, Erdington is a very diverse part of Birmingham, with a wonderful, strong community and neighbourhood spirit, and people who work very hard and look out for each other. One day you could be celebrating Eid in Stockland Green, or Vaisakhi in the local gurdwara; on another, you could be working with our strong Irish or African-Caribbean community to celebrate the Good Friday walk along the high street.

Our manufacturing history is well known, but sadly too many of our workplaces have closed. It is vital that new business comes into the constituency, so it is important that through the levelling-up fund we are given funding to develop our high streets, particularly Erdington High Street.

The Erdington constituency can look quite dark and lacking in green space when driving through it. That is because of roads such as the Gravelly Hill interchange, which I am sure everyone here knows as spaghetti junction. If you look more closely, however, under spaghetti junction—as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook) will confirm—you can walk along some of the most beautiful canal walkways in the country.

We are also fortunate to have many lovely parks such as Pye Hayes Park and Rookery Park, Short Heath Playing Fields, and the beautiful 13-acre site owned by Erdington rugby club. I would also like to mention the stunning bowling facility in the constituency run by the Erdington Court bowls club. The Brookvale lakes and Witton Lodge lakes, where residents take part in a duckling watch to ensure that we preserve the natural beauty of this area, are truly incredible. Alongside that is the amazing eco-hub run by an organisation called the Witton Lodge Community Association.

When I won this election, my husband looked on and said, “Well done. Now the work starts.” How right he was. After receiving more than 2,000 emails plus sacks of mail in my first month, I am under no illusions that the role of an MP is many things to many people. We are here to help, guide, advise, support and represent our constituents.

I want to thank the people of Birmingham, Erdington for putting their faith and trust in me. It is an amazing privilege to be here. My promise to them is that I will work tirelessly on their behalf, both in this place and in the community.

6.1 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I must congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton) on her speech, which she delivered with such feeling. I was sitting here waiting for clapping from the Gallery above—she must warn people not to do that, but she would have deserved it. Her speech was absolutely brilliant.

Given the time strictures, I will touch on just one little Bill. It would not be hard for people to work out that it is a trade Bill—the Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill, which will help to make Britain the best place in which to live. There is great kith and kin support between the United Kingdom and the antipodes. Most of my parents’ generation used to talk about this country as home, even if they had never been here. Many a New Zealand coffee table of that generation displayed a copy of one of those amazing books of beautiful photographs of the United Kingdom. The amazing thing was that they were all taken on a sunny day!

The deal with New Zealand and Australia is the UK’s first new free trade agreement since leaving the European Union. It is long overdue. New Zealand and Australia were sore when we went into the Common Market. I am a member of the UK National Farmers Union and, locally, there has been some concern about the deal as both Australia and New Zealand are agricultural juggernauts. The biggest dairy farmer in my Mole Valley constituency has about 350 cows. I think my largest sheep farmer probably has about 1,000 sheep. A couple of dairy farmers in the north of the South Island are milking 1,500 and 2,500 cows. The farm I left to come here, after lambing, had 30,000 sheep. Fortunately, the balance of timing means that we can work together. Moreover, the New Zealand NFU equivalent is looking to work with our farmers to assist in fulfilling some of the bids going into Europe.

The economic opportunities under the agreement will be considerable across a range of sectors and businesses. Any visitor to New Zealand or Australia will be struck by the fact that cars, trucks, and agricultural machinery—I

[Sir Paul Beresford]

do not just mean tractors—are dominated by south-east Asia, particularly by Japan. There is a desire to buy British trucks, cars and so on, but they are too expensive. The tariff change should give us an opportunity, but we need to get in there. I have been urging the appropriate Minister to get onto the manufacturers and to promote our goods in Australia and New Zealand. I have already suggested a campaign and have offered to translate. I hope that with the Government stimulating our industries we will get in there, open the doors and work towards going into the trans-Pacific partnership.

Given the time limit, I will stop at that point, but I reiterate that I am willing to help and need to help. This is an opportunity for huge sales to make Britain the best place in which to live.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The hon. Gentleman has been exemplary in watching the time limit but, although he has set such an excellent example, I am just going to make sure that everyone else adheres to the five minutes by setting a formal time limit. It is still five minutes, which is a long time if you speak quickly.

6.5 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I will speak very quickly, Madam Deputy Speaker. When I became chair of the all-party parliamentary group on dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties in 2016, the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014 was under way. I had taken that piece of legislation through Parliament as a shadow Minister so I was hopeful that it might lead to an advance in SEND provision in schools, but things have obviously not gone to plan. The new SEND Green Paper implies by its very existence that something has gone wrong.

Let us look at some numbers. Pupils with SEN are less likely to meet the expected standards on reading, writing and maths by the end of key stage 2, with only 22% of children with SEN achieving that compared with 74% of those with no recorded SEN. This continues at GCSE with only 27% of SEN children achieving a grade 4 or above in English and maths compared with 71% of those with no recorded SEN. In 12 years of a Conservative Government, those with SEND have endured a broken system, leaving a lasting impact on their futures.

As we know, special educational needs and disabilities are sometimes invisible, making them hard to identify and support. Many working class children are categorised as poor readers, not because they might have dyslexia but because they come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Others who might have dyslexia but do not have the money to access private assessment and diagnosis might never get the support that they need. Far from levelling up, this Government imprison those children in lower expectations.

As we make the necessary strides in special educational needs assessment, so the system supporting those needs faces greater strain on capacity. This is all about cost. I hope that that is not the reason for the conspicuous absence from the Government's recent Green Paper of the three Ds: dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. The

Government finally recognise the need for new high-level alternative provision, but I implore them to expand their priorities to specific learning difficulties. They can have a profound effect on a child's educational development, and without wider assessments we can only guess at the incidence rates of the conditions. In the meantime, children will struggle through their school years and lose the chance to fulfil their potential. That is not to say that those with specific learning difficulties are less able than their peers. On the contrary, neurodiverse individuals exhibit problem solving, lateral thinking and innovation skills often in excess of those exhibited by neurotypical individuals.

This year I was proud to be involved in the launch of Neurodiversity in Business, an initiative that at last count has seen more than 100 companies across the country, including the likes of Deloitte and the Bank of England, championing neurodiverse workers. They recognise the unique skills and benefits that neurodivergent employees bring to an organisation, and that is to be greatly welcomed and encouraged as it is so true. I welcome the Government's consultation on SEND provision, and I will certainly engage with the consultation in due course. I encourage all colleagues and organisations in the sector to do the same.

On another topic, I would like to take a moment to draw the House's attention to food insecurity. We know that families are struggling with the cost of living crisis—a crisis that is only going to get worse. More adults are reporting skipping meals—57% more in April than in January—and more children are unable to access nutritious food. At the same time public sector caterers, who make up an important part of the protection against food insecurity, are facing supply chain disruptions and what have been described to me as stock price explosions. It is getting more expensive to run the industrial kitchens in our schools, hospitals and prisons. It is therefore getting so much harder to ensure that services offer the same nutritious food.

The Government are allowing food insecurity to become worse, allowing standards to decline and doing nothing to prevent a public health crisis along the way. This is happening on their watch and there was nothing in the Queen's Speech to address it. That means it will only get worse until we have a change of Government to one with the will and the plan to grow the economy and be on the side of working people.

6.10 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton) on her maiden speech—I assure her that the case load continues year after year. I also offer my appreciation for another formidable lady: Her Majesty the Queen. I was delighted to see her join in the celebrations of her jubilee unaided yesterday.

On the Gracious Speech, I wish to talk about several of the Bills that are coming up. First, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill gives us the opportunity to level up each part of the United Kingdom. I was absolutely over the moon at the local election results in Harrow last week, when we took eight seats from Labour and took control of the council for the first time since 2006.

I look forward to the hard-working councillors levelling up Harrow and putting right what has been going wrong for far too long.

On the transport Bill, my constituents depend on good public transport, which we need throughout the UK, and we need to get people out of their cars and on to public transport, so I was delighted this morning that the developer Catalyst withdrew its planning application to build high-density multistorey flats on the Stanmore station car park. I trust that Transport for London will now abandon that plan completely.

On the social housing regulation Bill, I hope we are going to go further in not just regulating social housing but expanding the amount of it throughout the UK and providing more affordable housing for the people who need it. We must stop selling public land and start building homes on it, instead of allowing developers to end up with unsustainable capability.

The renters reform Bill is central—I refer the House to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—but I have a concern. By abolishing section 21 no-fault evictions, on which the Government consulted in 2019, we will improve the security of tenure for tenants and strengthen the position in respect of which landlords can give cause for regaining possession of their properties, but that must not lead to more section 8 evictions and tenants being landed with county court judgments across the piece. I hope we will have a new lifetime tenancy deposit model that eases the burden on tenants when they move from one tenancy to the next. That would improve the private rented sector overall.

I remind the Government that a section 21 notice is a trigger for my landmark Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which then leads to the local authority having a responsibility to help and advise people who are threatened with homelessness. I want to make sure that if we abolish section 21, local authorities are not let off the hook for their responsibility to help and assist single homeless people. It is also important that the Government stand by their pledge to develop a new ombudsman for private landlords so that disputes are resolved without the need to go to court, which is an expensive process for both sides.

On the financial services and markets Bill, I am delighted to hear that the Government are going to preserve access to cash. Far too many bank branches and ATMs have closed, and access to cash is a priority for many people in our society, so I am pleased that that will happen. In particular, this country's elderly population still relies heavily on and is dependent on cash, and we must protect that part of society.

I also welcome the boycotts, divestment and sanctions Bill. It is quite clear that we do not want local authorities or other public bodies in this country having their own foreign policy; that is something to be determined by the UK Government. The ongoing commitment to supporting the UK's Jewish community, and to support for Israel, is fundamental and I am delighted to see it.

The Schools Bill is clearly vital as we return to normality under the pandemic; I welcome it and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill. I am one of those who believe that people should be free to say what they wish, as long as they can be challenged on it, but not that we should get to the point where people are shouted down and prevented from putting forward their views.

Finally, this is Dementia Action Week. For people who are getting older and frailer, we must have more action from the national health service. I welcome and support the Queen's Speech.

6.15 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Government are great on slogans—"get it done", "oven-ready", "levelling up"—but the reality is that they have consistently failed to get the right things done, their ideas are mostly half-baked, and the key statistics show that they are levelling down, not up.

After 12 years, this country is going backwards. There is no plan to fix social care, improve the health figures, address education shortfalls or tackle neighbourhood crime. The Queen's Speech was a chance to put that right, address issues affecting the lives of ordinary people, move on from the pandemic and be in touch with the needs of business, families and the elderly. Instead, we have a programme of 38 Bills that will occupy parliamentary time over the next 12 months or so, but hardly any of them address the things that people really care about.

On education, the emphasis is on academisation—playing with structures when what is needed is catch-up, improvement, tending to crumbling buildings and giving children the best start in life. I support the work of the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom), but I have to say that how a Government who have closed 2,500 Sure Start centres and plan to replace them with 75 family hubs think they can lay claim to an ambitious early years strategy is beyond me.

According to the Government, every family should receive a minimum of five health visiting reviews. Even including remote and phone consultations, their own figures show that that is not happening. Nearly 30% of toddlers have missed out on the crucial 24 to 30 months check. In speech and language, an area in which waiting lists have been exacerbated by the pandemic, nearly 70,000 children are waiting for support. Children under seven often wait for more than two years. Where is the catch-up or improvement plan to help them? The Government can find time for a Bill to sell Channel 4, which was not in their manifesto, but not to legislate for a measly one week's unpaid leave for carers—a manifesto commitment on which every one of their Members stood.

There is no plan to reduce NHS waiting lists or ambulance delays. The reality of healthcare in Birmingham is that every day the west midlands ambulance service stacks hundreds of calls that require an ambulance response that it cannot provide. Midlands hospitals have the highest waiting lists in the country. University Hospitals Birmingham, a first-class institution for those it is able to treat, now has 185,000 people waiting for treatment. No wonder the country's health outcomes are deteriorating.

For care homes, there is still no plan to fix social care, one of the earliest promises made and abandoned by the Prime Minister, and no assistance to deal with staff retention or rising energy and insurance costs. Care homes, while still beset by many difficulties, have lost their covid-19 support grants—rather earlier than the support for newspaper grandees negotiated personally by the Prime Minister, if Mr Cummings is to be believed.

[*Steve McCabe*]

I have no time for the behaviour of some of the Extinction Rebellion activists, but do we really need a new law to deal with the antics of that minority group when we already have the Public Order Act 1986? The latest Bloomberg analysis of the Government's levelling-up strategy shows a 33% increase in crime in south Birmingham. Would not a law to establish viable neighbourhood policing units be of much greater value to my constituents?

On early years, speech and language, carers, care homes, waiting lists, ambulance services and the security of neighbourhoods, this Queen's Speech is a missed opportunity from a Government who stopped paying attention to the interests of the people they purport to represent. The slogans are now morphing into, "Can't you budget and cook on 30p a day?" and, "Why don't you just get another job?" They are out of touch and out of ideas.

6.20 pm

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome the concentration in the Queen's Speech on the importance of levelling up and expanding opportunity across the whole country, which is fundamental to our mission. It could not be more important than in the health service. I am glad to see the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), on the Treasury Bench, because he will know how passionately I feel, from personal experience, about the importance of levelling up all health service provision, but particularly for often underappreciated conditions, such as those that affect stroke survivors—the House will know of my interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on stroke.

Unfortunately, the provision of aftercare and therapy for stroke survivors remains patchy across the country, despite it being the largest single cause of adult disability. If we are serious about levelling up, I hope that we will invest more in those services and, in particular, take up the APPG's suggestion of transforming our already good national stroke plan into a fully-fledged national stroke strategy, joined up and fully resourced with a specialist workforce behind it.

Levelling up is also about getting education and health services right in relation to the criminal justice system, because failures there, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) pointed out, often have impacts on the justice system downstream. Poor educational outcomes, poor mental health and allied issues, failures in relation to social services and childcare, and poor housing all contribute to people falling into offending behaviour, getting into the justice system and then getting into the never-ending circle of reoffending. That ruins lives and harms the economy. Investment in those topics upstream is actually an investment in the whole public good, both societally and economically. I hope that the Government will redouble their efforts there, both in cash terms and through much more joined-up policy working across the various agencies.

I will turn to some specific legal issues, starting with the proposed Bill of Rights. I stood on and supported our 2019 manifesto commitment to update the Human Rights Act 1998 and its administrative law,

and I stand by that. In pursuance of that, the Government commissioned an expert panel of independents, under the chairmanship of the right hon. Sir Peter Gross QC, a highly distinguished former Lord Justice of Appeal. Sir Peter and his team produced a thoroughly detailed, comprehensive and meticulously argued report on how best to take this forward. He followed it up with most compelling evidence to the Justice Committee. I am persuaded by and support Sir Peter's proposals.

The Government, as they are entitled to do, appear to propose to go further than Sir Peter's proposals. Well, up to a point there is no harm in that; I am all in favour of updates, and I see no harm in putting into statute rights that are already well established, such as the right to trial by jury in England and Wales, or the right to freedom of speech, even though they are perfectly well protected under our existing common law.

Where I urge caution, however, is in going any further beyond Sir Peter's well researched and well argued proposals. It would perhaps be dangerous to go down the route of limiting the ability of individuals in the United Kingdom to assert their European convention rights in the domestic courts, which ultimately would simply mean more petitions being brought to the Strasbourg Court. On the face of it, that is potentially counter-productive to the Government's avowed intention of reducing litigation in this area.

I am delighted that we remain committed to our membership of the European convention on human rights. It is a fundamental. It was essentially written by a future Conservative Lord Chancellor, the future Lord Kilmuir, and it was Churchill's Government who took us into the convention, so it is in the Conservatives' DNA. But we must make sure that we approach this important issue with care and caution and that we do not run beyond the evidence.

I also welcome the draft victims Bill, and I look forward to the Government delivering on their commitment to pre-legislative scrutiny of it by the Justice Committee, which will be critical to the Bill having a real impact for people who suffer from crime. I also welcome the economic crime and corporate transparency Bill. That will be important, because our Committee recently took evidence on the prevalence of, and harm done by, fraud to the economy and individuals' lives. I hope that we will also use that Bill as an opportunity to introduce a long awaited and long argued for updating of the law on criminal corporate responsibility, an area in which we lag behind other common-law jurisdictions, especially on the other side of the Atlantic.

There are great opportunities in the Queen's Speech, but I have given a word of caution on one fundamental constitutional issue, as well as some constructive suggestions on how we can take important parts of the Government's agenda forward.

6.25 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I would really like every one of my constituents in Bradford West to be able to say that Britain is the best place to grow up and grow old, but unfortunately, given the failures of the Government, I cannot say that for every single one of my constituents. Actions speak louder than words, and this Prime Minister committed to levelling up "every

part of the UK”. That remains an idea and a slogan, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) said.

Last week, it was seven years since the people of Bradford West put their trust and faith in me to be their voice in this Chamber. I said then that the north was being neglected, and I say it again today. At the time, I shared the fact that it was my privilege to be representing a great northern city which is the youngest city in Europe, the birthplace of the Brontë sisters, has a world-renowned literature festival and so much more. Seven years later, after enduring austerity, an unforgiving pandemic and now a cost of living crisis, this great city is applying to be the city of culture and continues to move forward, but that is in spite of the Government’s failure to level up Bradford and their other broken promises.

I am very grateful for the £20 million that my constituency has secured for a health and wellbeing centre which is long overdue, but unfortunately that is a drop in the ocean when compared to the £30-billion-worth of potential growth and 27,000 jobs that have been robbed from Bradford by the Government’s failure to deliver on Northern Powerhouse Rail.

The Government have made Bradford a priority area for education, but in reality, this is also too little, too late. During the pandemic, I repeatedly warned the Government that disadvantaged pupils in Bradford were 18 months behind their wealthier peers and that the gap was widening. It is shocking that the Government have made Bradford a priority area for education while they plan to defund BTEC qualifications, despite the Department for Education’s equalities impact assessment concluding that the move will embed inequality into our education system.

Over the last 12 years, the city of Bradford and my constituents have been robbed of investment and opportunities to grow. The Government have only supplemented that loss by providing Bradford with handout investments that are not enough to truly level up.

Children across the UK and in my constituency deserve the best start in life and deserve access to education, training and job opportunities throughout their lives. Only today, however, the Government’s safeguarding Minister has suggested that people who are struggling with the cost of living crisis should take on more hours of work or move to better paid jobs. That is shocking and another reminder that “levelling up” is just a slogan. If the Government were truly committed to levelling up, they would give each and every person in my constituency the right support and investment to thrive and not just to survive. At the moment, some are not even surviving as they have to choose between who gets fed and whether the heating can go on.

Another example of opportunity and investment bypassing Bradford is the King’s Cross-style regeneration projects, in which the Government promised to transform 20 cities and towns across the country as part of their levelling-up agenda. It comes as no surprise to me that Bradford has not so far been named as one of the 20 cities. I ask the Minister whether Bradford will be overlooked again.

The Prime Minister alone has mentioned “levelling up” 97 times since 2019 in this Chamber, and other Ministers mention it too. Unsurprisingly, he has not yet

delivered on levelling up even once. I have said this before, and I will say it again: the litmus test for levelling up is Bradford. If the Government fail Bradford, they have failed to deliver on their levelling-up strategy—all of it. Without equality, equity and fairness, Britain will not be the best place to grow up and grow old. It is not going to work for people in Bradford West if there is not equality and fairness and if this Government do not put their money where their mouth is. Actions speak louder than words and my constituents will be judging everything this Government do.

6.29 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), although I must disagree with her because I believe that this country is the best place to grow up and grow old—although that does not mean there is not work to do to make it even better, and I look forward to supporting the Queen’s Speech in that regard.

To grow up and grow old well, you need a healthy pregnancy and a healthy birth, and I look forward to the women’s health strategy in that regard. Childhood needs to be filled with opportunity, and the schools Bill and the higher education Bill will provide us with that opportunity. We need to have better sport provision and better mental health services, again covered in the Queen’s Speech. We need to look at the impact of loneliness on social life, which now has a huge impact on elderly people. I was pleased to organise with my team a senior citizens’ fair last week in North Hykeham, where many people came along to hear about the clubs, activities and other support available for older people in the region.

I want to touch on two things. The first is the impact of covid on the national health service. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests as a doctor. The impact of covid means that a lot of people are waiting for treatment. I was somewhat perturbed to read that we want to eliminate waits of a year by 2025, because a wait of a year is a long time and 2025 is not particularly soon for someone who is waiting and in pain. However, I am pleased that we have community diagnostic services opening around the country to help to improve this. I am particularly pleased that one is opening in Grantham and will serve many of my constituents, and that two new operating theatres are being built at Grantham and District Hospital, which will also improve elective activity in the area. There are going to be 17 million more tests in the next three years. We are going to have an increased capacity of 9 million extra treatments and procedures and an increase in elective activity of 30%.

All that is very good. It is especially good to see the Government focusing on output and actions that benefit patients—treatments, tests and procedures; things that make them better—and not just inputs, as the Opposition do, of £X billion or £Y billion. I have noted in my career in hospital medicine that the amount of senior staff has increased, but demand, expectations and the number of administrative and managerial staff have increased, too. If we are to deliver for patients and not simply spend more money, we need to ensure that the extra money is spent only in those areas of clinical care

[Dr Caroline Johnson]

that improve patient outcomes. In that regard, I support calls for more medical students and more nursing students. I would also support a relative increase in remuneration for nurses providing direct clinical care so that those roles are not disincentivised. I appreciate that the NHS is operationally independent, but I look for ministerial reassurance that we are linking all the extra money that we are taking from our constituents to improve clinical care and clinical delivery.

The second thing I want to touch on is education and opportunity, which are inextricably linked. Conservative Members share the view that talent is uniformly distributed but opportunity, sadly, is not, and I welcome the Government's commitment to levelling up in that regard. I am lucky that we have excellent schools in my constituency and that some have seen huge investment this week, including Carre's Grammar School in Sleaford, which is receiving over £1 million to improve the structure of its buildings. That is fantastic news for all the successful schools involved in that bid.

The schools Bill offers us an opportunity to look not only at how we educate children in maths, English and science, but at how we contribute to a positive childhood. The MacAlister report, due out very shortly, will help to guide us on safeguarding improvements. In doing so, I hope the Education Secretary will protect children's lives and wellbeing by focusing on evidence. We often talk in the Select Committee about his focus on the evidence, so I hope that he will be looking at the evidence on how we can improve things for children, not just adding to the bureaucracy that teachers face.

I would like to see curriculum measures to improve sport, particularly girls' sport. Many teenage girls do less sport as they get older and throughout their secondary school experience. Children's sport is crucial to physical development. It is crucial to bone health and preventing osteoporosis in the elderly even. It is important to fitness, to mental wellbeing and to improving academic outcomes as well. I look forward to the Government bringing forward their schools Bill, where I hope to see an increase in minimum participation and the encouraging of more sport as a priority. I look forward to voting for the Queen's Speech when that opportunity arises.

6.34 pm

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): My constituents are facing a growing number of crises that continue to pile up day after day. I accept some of these difficulties are new, but most are not. Most of these difficulties have been brewing and festering for years. The Government's failure to solve these problems or come up with solutions has pushed many services to breaking point and now families are being left to bear the brunt. Despite the fact that day after day cash-strapped families are trying to make ends meet by working extra hours, often in multiple jobs, what do those on the Government Benches tell them? Learn to cook, learn to budget, work more hours, get a better paid job—you're responsible, you're to blame, it's you who are doing it wrong.

However, what people need from the Government is help to navigate through the things that are out of their control. They need them to solve the long-term issues which continue to push down on people's quality of living and eventually leave them out of options. It is one

of those issues that I want to address today. It is an issue that is not in the Queen's Speech, but really should be, because NHS dentistry and oral health inequality has been repeatedly unaddressed by this Government. Access to basic dentistry care in this country is often forgotten, but it is a vital part of the nation's health.

In 2016, an NHS Digital report found that just under half of dentists were thinking of leaving dentistry, so I warned the Government not to kick the can down the road and risk a crisis in dental care. I told the Government then that the most important measure they could implement, as highlighted by the British Dental Association, would be changes to the dental contract that incentivised prevention, but nothing was done.

In 2017, the BDA told us that 58% of the UK's NHS dentists were planning on turning away from NHS dentistry in the next five years. So again I warned the Government that we faced a national crisis. In 2019, *The Times* reported that 60% of dentists planned to leave the profession, or cut back NHS care in the next five years, with more than 1 million new patients turned away and some patients resorting to pulling out their own teeth. Yet again, nothing was done.

In 2020, I told the Government that a majority of NHS dental practices across England believed they could only survive for 12 months or less. The Government said they would look at the workforce issue "more broadly" and "in the round", but no action was forthcoming and 1,000 NHS dentists left the service. Earlier this year, hearing that almost 1,000 children under 10 in Bradford had to be admitted to hospital to have decayed teeth removed, I pleaded with the Government to finally deal with the issue that had been staring them in the face for years. Then, of course, to nobody's surprise except this Government's, last week, it was revealed that 2,000 dentists have quit the service in the last year.

We urgently need to reform the dental contract. It is not good enough to be told time and again, year after year, that reform is imminent, because I have been asking for seven years now and still the Government have yet to deliver. If the Government need help with budgeting, I can point the Chancellor in the direction of one of his own MPs who might have a course he can take up, but I desperately do not want to be back here in 2023 still trying to open the Government's eyes to the massive freight train coming towards them. I have sounded the alarm, other Members have sounded the alarm, and dentists and patients have sounded the alarm. We are all waiting for the Government to act and reform the dental contract. Patients and our constituents cannot wait any longer.

6.38 pm

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): Making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old is a big challenge. Ensuring where people are born and raised does not limit their quality of life and life expectancy is an even bigger challenge and one that lies at the heart of the Government's levelling-up agenda.

We all know the expression "You are what you eat." In Britain, we are trapped in a junk food cycle that means we now consume more highly processed foods than any other European country except Malta and have higher levels of obesity, yet we have had decades—even centuries—of political barriers to good food policy. We often hear cries of "Nanny statism" or "Don't tell us

what to eat.” The latest Government announcements on delaying the ban on junk food advertising on television before 9 pm and delaying restricting “Buy one, get one free” promotions follow that regrettable trend. As a self-confessed chocoholic, I struggle to resist the temptation to boost my energy levels with a bar of chocolate rather than, so I know at first hand the irresistible pull of promotions and multi-purchase deals. I appreciate some hon. Members believe that attempts to tackle the bombardment of unhealthy food should be postponed so as not to increase the cost of living, but they are wrong. Research shows that promotions encourage people to buy 22% more unhealthy food and drink than intended, and to consume more of it, too. Marketing tactics have a real financial cost, as well as a negative health impact.

Let us not forget that retailers have other choices. Instead of encouraging customers on tight budgets to spend more on non-essential foods through these offers, they could simply offer 50% discounts or, as some supermarkets have started to do, have a value range of products at affordable prices that covers the basic foods for a balanced diet.

The political context has changed in recent months, and the Government’s focus is rightly on helping with the cost of living. Although that is a priority, it should not prevent the introduction of these important measures. Any delay will mean more children living with obesity and too many having reduced life chances through ill health. Our constituents will not thank us or forgive us for doing a U-turn on their health.

Obesity is a national emergency. In England, about 68% of men, 60% of women and more than one in four children aged between two and 15 are obese or overweight. Although this is a nationwide issue, rates of obesity are disproportionately higher among people living in more deprived communities. The statistics for my city of Stoke-on-Trent are shocking: 76.1% of adults in Stoke-on-Trent are overweight or obese. That is the third highest figure of all local authorities in England.

As the cost of living continues to squeeze household budgets, low-income families are forced to choose the cheapest calories, which are typically the least healthy. The Government must ensure that, when it comes to tackling food insecurity and the cost of living, they introduce policies that make nutritious diets affordable, easy and accessible to families on the lowest incomes

There is a pressing need for a good food Bill to set out in law a long-term approach and clear targets for the food system, with better systems for independently monitoring policy. We talk about the need for a resilient food system in terms of supply chains and production, but we need to widen that narrative to one of a resilient population that is both financially resilient to price shocks and resilient in public health terms, such as to pandemics.

We must not lurch from crisis to crisis. Action on the nation’s obesity emergency needs to start now. I support the right to good food as a fundamental pillar of the Government’s levelling-up agenda. I support a school food standard to ensure our young people have the fuel to learn. I support bringing cookery skills and an understanding of nutrition into the school curriculum at every key stage and through community organisations such as family hubs. I support measures to enable British farmers to produce the food we need, and to enable the food industry to innovate and adapt by incentivising the creation of healthier and more sustainable

products. And I support better help within the NHS for people living with obesity, including social prescribing and fair access to bariatric services.

Good health is a vital ingredient in maximising our quality of life and longevity. Proper nutrition is the foundation of good health. Investment in access to good food will pay dividends both in savings to the NHS and in increased productivity, which will boost the economy and deliver on the promise of levelling up health outcomes.

6.43 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Speaking in last year’s Queen’s Speech debate, I welcomed the Government’s commitment to bringing forward a ban on conversion therapy. A year on, we are no further forward—in fact, we seem to have gone backwards—but I hope to see progress this year.

I hoped to see a “better business” Bill in the Queen’s Speech, to give us a cleaner, greener and fairer future. Businesses in my constituency are pushing me on this, as they understand how important it is to give businesses different priorities in law. I hoped to see something about that and am disappointed by its absence.

Talking of better business, I am also extremely disappointed to see no progress on legislating to outlaw fire and rehire, of which P&O Ferries is the latest example. Ministers and Conservative Members said it was absolutely terrible but, when push comes to shove, there is no action to outlaw the practice. That is a huge omission from the Queen’s Speech.

Instead, we get a promise to bring forward legislation to abolish the Northern Ireland protocol. Whose Northern Ireland protocol was it? It was the Prime Minister’s—he wrote it, he sold it to the British people—and now, once again, he is trying to renege on something he himself wrote. It demonstrates, yet again, that he is a Prime Minister who will say whatever he needs to say to get out of whatever position he is in at the time and then have no sense of responsibility for the promises he has made. I say to the House that this does affect us internationally. Who will do deals with us if he is going to bring forward legislation to break deals that he wrote himself and signed himself only two years ago?

Of course, the biggest omission at the moment is of any kind of proposals on tackling the dreadful energy crisis we have. Millions of families up and down the country are facing soaring energy bills and ever increasing costs of living. The Government have demonstrated that they have no plan to fix this. Families are paying triple their energy bill, and they need a solution now.

I was disappointed that the Government have not adopted a one-off windfall tax on the oil and gas giants, and let us just understand exactly why that is. It is because a windfall tax would affect not simply the oil and gas companies—incidentally, as we all know, they have said that with the level of profits they are getting, at several billion pounds a quarter, they would be quite happy to pay it—but the City investment funds and City hedge funds that the current Conservative party, along with Russian oligarchs of course, exists to serve. They are not in their places now, but the Education Secretary, the Secretary of State for Health and the Chancellor all have big City investment fund backgrounds. That is what they know, and that is who they are really defending when they refuse to have a windfall tax.

[*Christian Matheson*]

Locally, in my area of Cheshire West and Chester, we are leading the way on alternative and clean energy provision. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who is in his place next to me, and I have been very supportive of HyNet. Actually, I pay tribute to the Government for that particular scheme; they have assisted us. I know that, in his constituency, the Vauxhall Ellesmere Port plant is looking forward to an all-electric future, leading the way on green jobs. That is thanks to him and, again giving credit where it is due, thanks to the Secretary of State. However, I have to say to the Government that any attempts to bring back fracking will be given short shrift in my constituency, and I am very concerned about that.

On levelling up and transport, I was looking forward to some detail in the new transport Bill, and I will be keeping an eye on what the Government are proposing. At the moment, however, we need proper rail services. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and I are meeting the rail companies this week to try to restore direct services between Chester and London. At the moment, they have gone from 12 a day before the pandemic down to one, and now that has been doubled to two we are asked to be grateful for that. We are hopeful that we might get more services, but of course direct services are essential to economic growth. Instead, we have seen the cancellation of Northern Powerhouse Rail and the scrapping of the High Speed 2 eastern leg, which is a betrayal of the north. It is the same for buses. The Government have turned down a bid for more bus money from Cheshire West and Chester Council, even though Ministers described the bid as “excellent”. I hope the transport Bill will tackle the difficulties we are seeing with bus provision, and give more opportunity for places such as Chester to improve connectivity.

Finally, it is absurd that the great heritage asset that is the city walls of Chester has to be paid for out of the highways budget, so that money that should be spent on roads, potholes and pavements is being diverted, understandably, to pay for that great heritage asset. We need a separate fund for the walls.

6.48 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I was delighted to welcome the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to Stoke-on-Trent last week to meet local workers, businesses, educators and community groups. Stoke-on-Trent is on the up, and we are determined to deliver an even better place to grow up and grow old. We must now level up cities such as Stoke-on-Trent and seize on the opportunities of Brexit, free from the shackles of Brussels bureaucracy, through the Brexit freedoms Bill. Stoke-on-Trent is a city that has been neglected and held back for decades, but we have so much potential just waiting to be unleashed. Finally, we now have a Government and local politicians who are focused on securing the investment and delivering the improvements our city needs. We must particularly improve our local public transport, which is a barrier to jobs and skills opportunities. In parts of Meir, in my constituency, 40% of households do not have a car. For the rest of the city, the average figure is 30%. The need for rail and bus improvements is desperate, so the big win pledges that we have secured for investment from the transforming

cities fund, the bus service improvement plan, the restoring your railway fund and others have been gratefully received, because they remove some of the barriers to better jobs and skills opportunities.

I was delighted to champion the improvement works proposed for Longton station through the transforming cities fund, and it is time for those funded works to be delivered. Network Rail must start playing its full and properly co-ordinated part in the delivery, which it has not been doing up until recently. I hope that Great British Railways and the transport Bill will help to resolve how we can better deliver the transport improvements needed in cities such as Stoke-on-Trent. In particular, I hope that they will help to address organisations that can hinder progress, as Network Rail has done on the works that we have been doing across Stoke-on-Trent.

I also call on the Government to announce that our plans to reopen Meir station will proceed—I have been chairing the delivery board for that—and I ask them to continue to support us as we develop our plans for the reopening of the Stoke-Leek line. In building a better city, we are not only making it easier to get around, but reviving historic sites that give our city and our towns their unique character and appeal. I particularly welcome the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, which will help us to breathe new life into our towns and high streets.

The heritage action zones that we have won for Longton and for Stoke town, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon), and the levelling-up fund pledges for major regeneration sites, including the derelict Tams Crown Works in Longton, are all key to levelling up our communities and breathing new life into our town centres. Our city is becoming the place to invest for digital and creative sectors such as the gaming industry, right at the heart of the UK and spurred on by the massive investment in fibre gigabit connectivity. I was pleased last Friday to visit a site where Openreach is installing such connectivity in Fenton.

That is alongside improving education to ensure that everyone locally has the ability to access better skills and better-paid employment. The major announcement that Stoke-on-Trent will benefit from the family hubs programme and as a prioritised education investment area will ensure that every young person gets the best possible start in life, particularly in the early years.

We need to focus on the gaps in engineering and creative skills for the high paid, high-value jobs that we want to attract locally, to fill the gaps that employers regularly speak to me about. I particularly welcome the Government’s lifetime skills guarantee, which offers free training for adults to upskill. That will be significant in places such as Stoke-on-Trent, given the number of adults there without higher level qualifications. The Schools Bill and the higher education Bill can get us on the right track to ensure that young people and everyone in our city achieve their full potential.

I hope to see some more support for the ceramics industry. There are real concerns about the current cost of energy for high energy use manufacturers, particularly the local world-leading ceramics industry. I know that the Prime Minister is listening, and he did so carefully on his visit last week to Churchill China, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis). I hope that we will not allow

other countries to steal a march on the fantastic British ceramics industry. Increased energy costs remain a significant concern for much of the sector, and we must see more support, especially for the SMEs that did not qualify for much of what has been announced thus far.

6.53 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Throughout the pandemic, children and young people have paid a very high price in their liberty, learning loss and mental wellbeing. We had the hokey-cokey of school reopenings and exams inflicted on parents, pupils and teachers, but our young people have shown remarkable resilience and school staff rose to the challenge. Now is the time to recognise those challenges and sacrifices. Now is the time to address the widening attainment gap between the wealthiest and the poorest children. Now is the time to embrace new ways of teaching and learning, as well as to capitalise on new levels of parental engagement. I am afraid that Her Majesty's Gracious Speech failed our children spectacularly. Only one sentence was dedicated to children or education—yet here we are with the most severe disruption to our schools for two years and crises in children's mental health and special educational needs and disability.

The Education Secretary has managed to secure parliamentary time for a schools Bill and he is using that precious time to tinker with school structures—what a waste. This technocratic Schools Bill tinkers around the edges of the management and governance of schools and is not what parents, pupils or employers are crying out for. They want a broader offer that equips our young people with broader life skills and experiences that nurture creativity, build resilience and teamwork, and boost their wellbeing.

All of us, on both sides of the House, want to see children in school and are alarmed by the large numbers of children missing from school. I am concerned, however, that the Government's zero-tolerance approach overlooks the needs of children who might be struggling with their mental health or special needs. We need to identify and tackle the root causes of school absence, rather than go for the "all stick and no carrot" approach.

I hope that the Government will use the clauses in the Bill that relate to the funding formula to reverse the devaluation of the pupil premium. I am proud that that Liberal Democrat policy to support the poorest pupils was introduced when we were in the coalition Government, but it has been cut in real terms by £160 per primary child and £127 per secondary pupil over the past seven years since we left Government. With the attainment gap growing, the pupil premium must be restored to its original value if the Government really are serious about levelling up.

Time and again in this place, I have highlighted the growing mental health crisis among children and young people. We know that unhappy children are less able to learn, thrive and perform well. Our teachers are overburdened and unable to cope with the immense challenges around pupil wellbeing, yet there was no reference in the Queen's Speech to the urgent action that we need. I suggest that we need an urgent children and young people's mental health recovery plan. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is here, and in the same way that he has focused on the elective care backlog, I implore him to come up with a similar

plan on children's mental health, because it is desperately needed. We would not ignore a child with a broken leg, yet too many children who are mentally unwell cannot cope without access to the help and support that they need. Liberal Democrats are calling for a dedicated, qualified mental health professional in every school.

Finally, there was no reference to catch-up funding either. The Sutton Trust found that more than two thirds of primary heads are struggling to help children due to a lack of catch-up funding. Schools in my constituency are drawing on parental donations to support children with catch-up. This is a political choice. People may no longer want to talk about the pandemic, but its impact on our young people and our economy will be felt for decades if the right investment is not forthcoming.

I call again on the Government to step up and provide the full £15 billion of catch-up funding that was recommended by their adviser, Sir Kevan Collins. The Education Policy Institute said that the cost to the economy of lost learning could run into the trillions—I repeat, the trillions—over the next 80 years, and that is based on OECD data. That is many times the return on investment of key infrastructure projects, if the full £15 billion catch-up funding is committed. Let us start treating our children—the future generation on whom we will all be reliant one day—as an investment and not as a cost. Sadly, the Queen's Speech has largely ignored them.

6.58 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): May I take this opportunity to say a great deal of thanks from my constituency to the Queen for her service over almost 70 years, as I may not get that chance going forward?

The subject of today's session is making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old. Two and a half years into my service as the MP for my constituency, I thought that it would be worth touching on a few things that are trying to move that plan forward.

We have had millions of pounds for Hinckley Academy to make sure that we have education that supports our local children. We have had £19.9 million for Twycross zoo to create a conservation and education centre to breed the conservationists of the future. We have had £28 million for internet for Leicestershire, which means that 330 houses in Sketchley Brook in Burbage now have better, faster internet access. We have had £1.8 million to improve Hinckley high street and ensure that people go there and want to enjoy it, whether they are a child or an OAP. We are working on improving the A5, which is vital infrastructure for our constituency for people to get to their jobs: £20 million has been invested and we moved through decision point 1 in March. I am keen to see that go forward.

Most importantly, £7 million has been put towards Hinckley hospital, with another community diagnostic centre coming and a plan that is ready to go. I am dead keen to make sure that there is no red tape in its way, because it puts Hinckley on the map and provides the service that we need for our community of children, adults and OAPs. That is what it is all about.

In the three minutes that I have left, I want to focus on two subjects: planning and the Online Safety Bill. I have heard the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities use the acronym BIDEN

[Dr Luke Evans]

for the five crucial points of planning: beauty, infrastructure, democracy, environment and neighbourhoods. I put it to him that he has missed a trick there, because “INBED with Gove” would be a far better selling point. However, the principles are right: we need the right homes, in the right place, with the right infrastructure that is right for our environment. That is fundamental to our planning system, but the current system does not deliver it. My constituency typifies that, because under the Lib Dem borough council we do not have an up-to-date local plan, which means that every single day we are open to speculative development without that infrastructure, without those amenities and without that support.

I am pleased that the Queen’s Speech is bringing forward planning change. That should concentrate on strengthening neighbourhood plans and localism in action, especially for those without an up-to-date local plan. The infrastructure levy is important for getting funding up front for the amenities that we need: the roads, the GP surgeries, and the schools. All those things need to be rectified, so I am glad that change is being introduced. Of course, there is also the question of building out. Developers getting the land is one thing, but using it is another. We need houses for young people and their families to aspire to, but we also need houses for our pensioners to retire or downsize to, and we need to provide support for them.

I come at the Online Safety Bill through my work on body image. There are two fundamental things that I would like to see in the Bill. First, there needs to be a legally named person for the algorithm. We have safeguarding leads in schools, we have Caldicott guardians in health and we have GDPR controllers. On our social media and on the internet, the algorithm is fundamental, so naming someone who is accountable would mean that anyone in this House or in this country could hold the big companies to account. That is imperative in lifting the bonnet to see what is underneath and what is driving the content that all of us—children or adults—are served. Secondly, we should allow people to choose to be served verified authentic images. The technology exists. We are allowing people to choose anonymity, so why do we not do it with authenticated images? Those two little changes would really make sure that we grow up and grow old in the best of Britain.

7.3 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): There has already been quite a lot of discussion about waiting lists, but I want to talk about another aspect of the situation. Waiting times for mental health services continue to be chronically oversubscribed, if people are actually deemed ill enough to be referred to them in the first place. If I may, I will give just one example of what that means for the person who is waiting.

I have a constituent who was advised in 2020 that she was displaying signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and emotionally unstable personality disorder. She was accepted on a dialectical behaviour therapy treatment course with a two-year waiting list. Of course, the wait has been exacerbated by covid. However, in the second year of waiting there has been no update whatever from the mental health trust, so my constituent is just left waiting and wondering how much longer it will be

before she receives any treatment at all. Of course, as the MP’s office we have been chasing the trust as well, but we have not heard anything either. This is a really appalling way to treat some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) in what she said about dentistry. In my area, waiting lists are in their thousands, with one practice citing a waiting list of more than 3,000 people. One constituent contacted me because of the pain she was experiencing. She described her attempts to register at a practice as a fight, which I think sums up the situation perfectly. In the last six months of 2021, I was contacted by dozens of different constituents, all of whom were contacting me on behalf of their families as well as themselves. It is well documented how challenging the issues dentists face in relation to the unit of dental activity, which does not encourage dentists to take on new patients and accommodates only 50% of the population. That, in effect, means we start from a position where the Government know many people will be denied access to dental care but have consciously and deliberately accepted that their policy will leave many people either forced to carry on in pain or seek treatment from the private sector. The whole system is in desperate need of reform.

Of course, we cannot have a debate on the NHS at the moment without having regard to the impact of covid, but we should not just limit it to covid. People suffering from long covid remain a huge issue. Recent reports suggest that the number of people seeking help for long covid is in the region of 1.8 million—a huge number. It has been reported that some sufferers are waiting so long for help that they are taking advice on buying their own oxygen to help with their breathlessness, while others are seeking advice on accessing private healthcare because they cannot get anything from the NHS. That is the nub of the issue.

The pattern in just about every aspect of healthcare—surgical procedures, mental health support and dental treatment—is that people are finding the system they have paid into all their lives is no longer there for them. The founding principle of universal healthcare free at the point of use, which is supposed to be the bedrock of the NHS, is under threat. That will lead to privatisation by default and we will be all the poorer for that.

I want to say a little bit about the cost of living, because every indicator I see shows that things will get much worse before they get better: interest rates, inflation, energy bills and food bills. We are on the cusp of a tsunami that will send many people under. I will not even start to talk about the complete failure to support British agriculture and get crops planted in the ground, which will cause us problems next year. For many, the point of destitution has already arrived. I am sorry to say that the number of people I see in that situation, because they have already gone through all the emergency assistance agencies and have had their quota for the year, shows me that there is a real problem and that the state is not offering any solutions. Telling people to get a better paid job or work more hours is just patronising nonsense that just shows how out of touch this Government are.

In those circumstances, it is shocking that on the most pressing issue, which requires urgent action—that is, the cost of living—there is nothing in the Queen’s Speech. There is nothing to give families the security

they need. I do not see the objection to a windfall tax on North sea oil and gas profits. The clue is in the name: windfall. The companies were not expecting that money, so it cannot be the restraint on investment that some would claim it to be. Such a tax would make a huge difference to my constituents. In my constituency alone, 12,500 families would see £400 off their bills as a result of a windfall tax. We should really continue to push for it.

In the end, we have a whole system where public services are being rowed back. Many constituents see their transport network decaying, public services decaying, local councils starved of resources and town centres closing down. There is so much more we need to address. I am afraid that, for me, the Humble Address fails to do that.

7.8 pm

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). I congratulate him on Ofgem's recent announcement that Ellesmere Port, as well as Redcar, will progress to stage 2 of the hydrogen village trials.

Today's debate is on making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old, and we are doing just that. However, the Queen's Speech must be viewed in the context of a war in Europe and a growing energy crisis, which is why the energy security Bill is one of the most important Bills in the speech. Defence and energy security go hand in hand. Putin has been emboldened because of Europe's collective reliance on Russian gas and he uses it as a weapon, as can be seen in his rash reaction to Finland's desire to join NATO. Not only will our energy Bill enable us to achieve energy sovereignty in a dangerous world, but it moves us further along the path to net zero and creates thousands of jobs in the process, in places such as Teesside.

In Teesside, we are quickly becoming the centre of excellence for green technology through: offshore wind; the world's first industrial-scale carbon capture utilisation and storage project; hydrogen production, with 5 GW of hydrogen planned and the hydrogen village trials that I mentioned a few moments ago; and, of course, our nuclear power station at Hartlepool. It was commissioned in 1983, a whole 10 years before I was born. Only three power stations have been commissioned in the UK since then. In the 13 years of the Blair-Brown Government, not one new power station was constructed and six were decommissioned. New Labour turned its back on new nuclear, and we are righting its wrongs with a new power station every year for the next decade. This Queen's Speech will help us to address that great national challenge, ensuring that our critical infrastructure remains future-proofed to the evolving needs of the 21st century.

Investment in infrastructure is a key signature of this Government's commitment to levelling up, but I think we can go further. I look particularly to HS2, which currently has no commitment to using UK-sourced steel in its construction—that is wrong. It is nonsensical to have a situation where every few years the steel industry finds itself in further hardship and us MPs with steel constituencies go knocking at the Treasury's door. Surely a better use of taxpayers' money is for procurement rules to benefit foundation industries in the UK over international counterparts, and I hope that

that is what the Procurement Bill allows. It is not an excuse for UK industry not to be competitive in its pricing, but we should acknowledge in any procurement decision the economic and social value that investment in UK industry brings and the levelling-up effect that such investment can have.

The purpose of our levelling-up programme is the next generation, which is why this Government are also investing in a world-class schools system to deliver the high-quality education that our young people deserve. The Schools Bill will absolutely set us on a path to achieving that. In Redcar and Cleveland we have made great strides under this Government to invest in our local schools, particularly at a primary school level, with more than £20 million invested to revitalise the 48 primary schools over the past decade, and Newcomen Primary School remains one of the best in the country. Despite that, more still needs to be done to ensure that every child has the education they deserve; in my part of the world that particularly relates to our secondary schools and I hope the Schools Bill will help to achieve that.

Finally, I wish to thank the Government for bringing forward the conversion therapy Bill again. I speak as a gay Christian who cannot wait for this Government to finally outlaw conversion therapy. Everyone, LGBT or otherwise, deserves to grow up and grow old being who they are, without the threat of disgusting, outdated and, I hope, soon-to-be criminal practices labelled as "conversion therapy".

We are three years into this Prime Minister's leadership. We have faced the biggest political challenge in the post-war era with Brexit and the single biggest health challenge in 100 years with covid. We now face the dual challenge of our energy security and war in Europe once again. This Queen's Speech demonstrates our willingness to tackle the big issues of the day—becoming energy secure while levelling up across the whole of the UK. We have been tasked with delivering on the people's priorities, and we are doing just that.

7.13 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): I welcome the legislation to protect access to cash, which is a lifeline for many of the most vulnerable and one of the best budgeting tools there is. However, it needs to be enacted speedily, as closures are happening daily and the more there are, the more difficult and costly it is to reverse them. There needs to be statutory regulation for shops to offer cashback. It is a service offered by many but it could be withdrawn at any time at the moment. Shops also need to be forced to accept cash; people who choose to budget that way should be able to spend where they wish.

I also welcome the regulation to force banks to reimburse the losses through the push payment scams. Enforcement and tough penalties will be key, but I would also like to see transparency, so that customers can see how quickly and how many people banks reimburse on this aspect, and they can then choose their banks accordingly. More needs to be done to protect consumer rights, and not just by giving the Competition and Markets Authority new powers to fine firms that break the rules. We need to ensure that consumer review groups are consulted on all changes made to consumer

[Yvonne Fovargue]

protection, particularly when any EU laws are scrapped. We do not want a reduction in standards. There also needs to be a new duty and a clear remit for the Financial Conduct Authority to have regard to financial inclusion, and ensure that consumers are not excluded from products and services by the poverty premium.

Many comments have been made about people using food banks because they cannot budget or cook a meal from scratch. Both in my own experience and in 23 years dealing with people in debt and on low incomes, I have not found that to be the case. In fact, I have found quite the opposite, and I will give the House a little of my own experience to demonstrate that.

When I was left alone with a very young child, I did find a job very quickly. It was not very well paid, but I could manage if I was careful and if there were no unexpected bills, which are often the tipping point causing people to get people into debt. I got up at 6 am, got my daughter—who was 18 months old—ready for the childminder, prepared breakfast, drove 30 miles to work because there was no suitable public transport, did a day's work, drove home, gave my daughter tea, bathed her and put her to bed. At 8 pm I thought about my tea, and prepared for the next day. That was what happened on every weekday; weekends were spent tidying, washing, and trying to spend some time playing with my daughter.

When people are doing that week in, week out, it is no wonder that they have little time or energy to prepare meals from scratch every day, or batch cook every weekend. I certainly did not. It is no wonder that people resort to frozen convenience food or, heaven forbid, a takeaway instead of a rushed sandwich. There is a saying about not judging people until you have walked a mile in their shoes. My work in a citizens advice bureau brought that home to me, and I think we would all do well to remember it.

There are now 2.1 million people a year using food banks to survive. It has been said that throwing money at the problem will not help, but actually it is probably the only thing that will help, as too many people have too little income to pay bills and eat and heat. A windfall tax is one possible measure; reinstating the £20 uplift to universal credit and a moratorium on deductions from benefits which leave people well below the poverty line would also help. Undoubtedly, however, there will be an increase in demand for debt advice, and an increase in the number of people who have no disposable income to pay their creditors.

I should like to know what discussions the Government are having with both businesses and their own Departments about the treatment of people who have no chance of paying off their debts owing to lack of income. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, nearly 4 million low-income households are behind with essential bills, rent or debt payments, up threefold since the pandemic. What measures are being considered to help these people? Perhaps we should listen to Jubilee Debt Campaign and write off some of those debts. There is no point in leaving people in constant debt. All that that is doing is building up mental health problems and ill health generally and placing more and more pressure on the support networks.

The Prime Minister promised to bring his full fiscal firepower to tackle the cost of living crisis. Given their performance so far, these measures have proved a pretty damp squib for most of my constituents.

7.18 pm

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): Today's theme is "Making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old". As I am still clinging desperately to my 20s, I will focus on the growing-up side of things; and as a north-east MP, I will also focus on my region and my own fabulous constituency.

We know that there are talented kids throughout our country, in every single community, but for generations—and, unfortunately, because of the actions of successive Governments—too many ambitious, talented young people feel that they have to move away from their home towns to chase their jobs and their fortunes. The Government are already making progress in that regard, particularly in our region. We see swathes of high-quality jobs coming to Darlington, thanks to the opening of the new Treasury and Department for International Trade campuses, but also as a result of the success of Ben Houchen, the Tees Valley Mayor, empowered by Government policy on devolution and on freeports. That has brought high-quality, highly skilled, highly paid jobs to our region, well within commuting distance of Bishop Auckland.

However, this is not just about jobs. We need town centres with diverse shops, enjoyable leisure activities and a vibrant night life for the whole town to enjoy. On this, the Government are helping pretty well. In Bishop Auckland, as well as the levelling-up fund, which is delivering much-needed infrastructure improvements to the A68 at Toft Hill and Whorlton bridge, we are also the proud recipient of towns fund investment. Since I became MP for Bishop Auckland there has been over £70 million of direct funding into Bishop Auckland to deliver tangible improvements to our town centres, attracting private investment and creating job opportunities for our young people. I am delighted that the Queen's Speech will continue this ambitious plan through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill and the non-domestic rating Bill, helping empower businesses, improve our local communities and breathe new life into our high streets, which we all know they need.

Town centres are the cultural hearts of our communities. In my constituency we are very pleased to have the Bowes Museum and The Witham in Barnard Castle, in Bishop Auckland we benefit from Kynren and the British Auckland food festival, and in Spennymoor we have the Norman Cornish gallery. But it is not just town centres where we have these cultural gems; they also exist further afield, such as the Grassholme Observatory in Teesdale, the Locomotion railway museum out by Shildon and great country shows such as those in Eggleston and Bowes, which I enjoy every summer. If this sounds like a tourism pitch, it absolutely is, because the best way to turbocharge Bishop Auckland and make it one of the best places in which to grow up and thrive is by ensuring County Durham wins UK city of culture 2025. Let me rephrase that, because we do not want to be the city of culture; we want to be the UK's first ever county of culture. I hope Ministers on the Front Bench today will send this message to the Culture Secretary, because we know what city of

culture status can do in unlocking opportunities for tourism and advertising that County Durham is open for business.

Being the best place to grow up also means not living in fear of crime and in communities riddled with antisocial behaviour; we will all know about that from our own communities. I am very pleased that County Durham is already seeing its share of 20,000 new police officers; they are some cracking people and I thank them wholeheartedly for their service and engagement with our local communities. However, those unfortunate enough to be victims of crime need to feel that they get both support and justice, and both as MP for my community and chair of the all-party group on one punch assaults I greatly welcome the victims Bill and all it will achieve.

It would be remiss of me not to touch on the conversion therapy ban. It has been talked about for a long time and I am very pleased to see it in the Queen's Speech this year, because young people—straight, gay, bi, or trans—should be free to live and love as they wish to and be supported in that by the Government. That means finally banning the abhorrent practice of conversion therapy, not just for under-18s and not just for people who are part of the LGB community, but for everyone—for the entire LGBT community. I certainly plan to continue my engagement with Government to make sure we get the right legislation on this abhorrent practice.

7.22 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Over the last few days of this debate we have heard some harrowing stories from constituencies around the country of poverty, deprivation and destitution—of people living hand to mouth in some of the worst possible scenarios. However, the Secretary of State who opened the debate today seems to have missed a lot of that, because the picture according to the Secretary of State is that this is a place where people get more than enough opportunities, where young people have never had it so good, where every school is funded exactly as it should be, and where the health service is operating as it should. I have absolutely no idea what parallel universe the Secretary of State is living in.

It is fine to talk about opportunities, but what about the obstacles people face before they get to those opportunities, the biggest of which is poverty? Let us be clear about this: poverty did not arise a few months ago with the cost of living crisis. Poverty has been worsening over the past 12 years because of an ideological austerity agenda by the Conservative Government that has devastated our communities. This is the reality of where we are.

At a time when people are facing some of the worst challenges ever, we see Conservative Members, even a Minister, going on national television saying that people should budget better and work more hours, as if that is the reason they are poor. When is the last time that Members met anybody who chose to be poor? When is the last time that we heard a child who was born in poverty say, "You know what? Actually, I am glad that I was born in that household."

I urge the Secretary of State to come to Bradford. Our young people are full of aspiration and full of ambition, but, tragically, the media does not give Bradford an easy ride. Frankly, I am fed up with the media's

unfair image of Bradford and of our young people. We are a vibrant city, with a young population. What we lack is the opportunity.

Earlier today, the Secretary of State stood at that Dispatch Box and told me, my constituents and the people in my district that, somehow, we do have that opportunity. The reality is that he could have used his time differently in this Queen's Speech debate. Conservative Members know that. Those who represent constituencies with poverty and deprivation will know inside themselves that this Queen's Speech is a missed opportunity. It does nothing to provide opportunity to young people in Bradford. It does nothing to address the health inequalities. A person living in the inner cities of Bradford is likely to live 10 years fewer than if they lived in an affluent city suburb. That is the reality. When it comes to educational attainment, a person from Bradford is likely to achieve a lot less than if they lived in a rich leafy suburb. That is the unfairness. Those are the barriers that we are talking about.

If the Secretary of State for Education, who spoke earlier today, and the Health Minister, who will close the debate, want to address these inequalities, they have missed that opportunity. They should listen to our suggestion. We need an emergency budget to address the destitution that is rife in our country. Poverty is a political choice, and the people of this country will remember the choice that the Government have made.

7.28 pm

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): How to follow that! Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will try to just use the microphone for amplification.

I am grateful to the Opposition for choosing this subject. It is a very good way of framing the mission that we have as a country. A nation in which it is good to grow up and grow old is one that is also ready for the threats of our times. I am with Edmund Burke who said that "the sources of the commonwealth are in the households".

The strength of our country is found in our families and in our communities.

The threats are very real. We have seen in this century already how precarious our financial system is. We have seen very recently what a pandemic can do to global health and economic systems. We are witnessing now the appalling reality of war in Europe and the real threat of nuclear war. I think also of the threat of technological collapse triggered by accident or sabotage, and of the prospect, even if we do not fully believe the prophets of the apocalypse, of what climate change could do to the developing world, inducing extraordinary upheaval and the prospect of hundreds of millions of people on the move, heading for our safe and temperate continent. We face a series of very real threats to our country and to our civilisation.

There is a lot to be confident about in the UK, though, such is the strength of our institutions, including our democracy and, for all our disputes, the strength of this place—our Parliament. I think also of the dedication of those who serve the state on the frontline, not least in the British Army. I mention those who form the largest garrison in the UK in my constituency in Wiltshire.

Some of our country's greatest assets are not found in the agencies of the British state. I think of two recent crises that did us proud as a country: the situation of

[*Danny Kruger*]

millions of isolating people during the covid lockdowns and the plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. For all the efforts of Ministers and officials in both those situations, it is fair to say that the apparatus of the state struggled to manage fast enough to help. But society did not: millions of people stepped forward spontaneously during covid to organise mutual aid groups to support their neighbours, and hundreds of thousands of people have offered homes in support of refugees. In both cases, the state enabled and helped to fund the work of communities, but it was communities that took the initiative and did the work.

That brings me to the nub of my argument: if we are to rise to the threats of our time, the crucial thing—the watchword of our whole strategy—should be resilience. That of course means national security, and yes, we need to modernise the British state and to invest even more than we currently do in our national defence. We also need real security in our energy supplies, in our food supplies and in technology. The system we really need to be strong, though, is not the state or the economy but society itself. That is the real foundation of national resilience and national security: the security of our communities and families.

How do we strengthen our communities and families? Communities need the plans outlined in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill in the Queen's Speech: more devolution and more community power. I also want to see more reform of our public services to put them in the hands of local people, rather than have them as outposts of the central state. Families need more power and resources, too. We need more family-sized homes, including the affordable and social housing that has been announced. I also welcome the plans for the expansion of the community hubs programme.

When it comes to childcare and social care, the answer does not lie in ever greater, larger provision, large-scale warehousing of children and the elderly, trying to arrange for the home and the family to do as little as possible. We must help people to live as they would prefer, to work closer to home and to have time for meaningful family life. We need people to be able to spend the money that is available for childcare and residential social care in the way that is best for them, to look after their children or their parents at home if they wish, or to pay for informal support among friends and family. To put it bluntly, it should not be possible to get Government money only if you put your dependants in an institution.

While I am at it, we need taxes and benefits that reward couples rather than penalising them. The family is the best and most important welfare agency that we have or possibly could have. We should invest in it and trust in it.

7.32 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): When I read the theme of today's debate, I truly did not know whether to laugh or cry. On whose deluded planet could anyone believe that Britain is the best place to grow up and grow old? Really? Have the Government had a good look at other countries? An OECD survey covering 2017 to 2019 showed that 15.5% of folk in Britain aged over 66 were living in relative poverty.

Rates in Iceland, Denmark and Norway were under 4%. Small, independent countries can do it, but under this Tory Government? Nae chance.

I wish to speak for a moment on behalf of the WASPI women. In the Pensions Act 1995, the Government increased the state pension age for women from 60 to 65, with a further increase to 66 in the Pensions Act 2011. The changes were poorly communicated to the women affected, with many not finding out about them until 2012. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman found that the Department for Work and Pensions was guilty of maladministration.

The Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign for the women affected is calling for an immediate one-off compensation payment of between £11,666 and £20,000. By the end of this calendar year, some 220,190 women across the UK will have died waiting for justice in the seven years since the WASPI campaign began. The Exchequer has saved £3.8 billion in compensation through those deaths, based on likely compensation figures called for by WASPI. I could go on. Those women need justice. They paid in—the Government should pay out.

Many of our elderly are supported by unpaid carers, a much neglected group who make the difference to many. Carers UK has asked the Tory Government to take immediate action, as it feels it is not too late for the Government to step in and recognise carers' vital role. That is in England, of course. Scotland has provided a carers allowance to unpaid carers. It was the first payment made by Social Security Scotland. It increases carers allowance by some 13%, with eligible carers receiving £231.40 every six months. The Scottish Government's carers allowance supplement means that since 2018 carers have received more than £460 a year more in Scotland than carers in the rest of the UK. Like many of us, Carers UK was looking for an employment Bill giving immediate rights to flexible working. That is a huge omission from the Government's programme for business.

We have heard already about Scotland's fantastic baby box and how it supports families who cannot afford much. In Scotland, people and the Government care about those less fortunate than themselves. Could we have some of that down here in England? "Britain" is mentioned in the title of the debate, but most of the Minister's speech today was about England and possibly Wales and Northern Ireland. There was not a great deal for Scotland. This Tory UK Government increasingly let Scotland down. The best way for Scotland to get out of poverty is for us to become an independent country, giving us the powers to make Scotland the best place to grow up and to grow old. I strongly look forward to that.

7.37 pm

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in today's debate ar ran pobl Ynys Môn—on behalf of the people of Ynys Môn—and to follow many excellent speeches. The subject of today's debate—making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old—is truly one that particularly resonates with my constituents.

In the Queen's Speech debate a year ago, I spoke about how the UK Government's plans were hard-wired for opportunity. I spoke of initiatives already ongoing

in Ynys Môn, such as the Holyhead hydrogen hub, Minesto and Morlais, and I spoke of my hopes and aspirations for Ynys Môn. One year on, I can see genuine progress for my constituency—an island that includes some of the most deprived communities in the UK.

Last May, my island community was reeling from the withdrawal of Hitachi from the proposed Wylfa Newydd nuclear power station on Ynys Môn. The company cited financing as a major issue. The potential high-quality employment opportunities for local people from the proposed plant were hugely significant in an area of high unemployment. The potential loss hit the community hard. Since then, the Government have taken significant action. They have fast-tracked the Nuclear Financing Bill to support the funding of new nuclear. They have produced the British energy security strategy, in which Wylfa was specifically mentioned, in which the Government committed to the acceleration of nuclear and to eight new nuclear plants this decade. The Government are also setting up the Great British nuclear delivery vehicle, which will be headed up by Simon Bowen—a Welshman.

In January, the Prime Minister, who is a fervent support of Wylfa, visited the site with me to see its potential for himself. Just last week, in a first for Ynys Môn, Wylfa was visited by the Energy Minister, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Secretary of State for Wales. They came to announce the £120 million future nuclear enabling fund, and the plans for at least one freeport in Wales. I am so proud that Anglesey is now front and centre of Government policy—an island in north Wales where our most senior Ministers come to make significant national announcements.

So how does that fit into today's debate? I regularly highlight to this House how Ynys Môn haemorrhages its young people every year as they go in search of skilled employment. The data shows that we have an average number of births and an average number of schoolchildren. We have fantastic secondary and tertiary education on the island. Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, headed up by Dafydd Evans, is one of the largest FE colleges in the UK. It has excellent facilities and gives practical vocational training across a range of disciplines, including the energy sector. Aled Jones-Griffith is the principal of Coleg Menai, which worked with Horizon to produce young apprentices, who had to leave Ynys Môn to find work at the Hinkley Point nuclear power station. Ynys Môn wants its young people to come back. Ynys Môn needs the next generation of young people to stay on the island and to have a future. Without local jobs, our bright, keen young people take their skills and enthusiasm elsewhere in search of better careers, better opportunities and better pay—and with them they take our Welsh language and culture.

I made a commitment to Ynys Môn that I would work hard and fight to bring jobs and investment to its shores. I will be supporting the UK Government's priorities for the year ahead, including the energy security Bill, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, Welsh freeports, and the shared prosperity fund, so that the communities on Ynys Môn will reap the rewards that will make it a great place to grow up too. Under this Government's plans, Ynys Môn is shifting from a place that feels forgotten to one in which our young people can look forward to the same exciting opportunities that others across the UK enjoy—a place where local people can

earn good salaries, enjoy fulfilling careers and buy their own homes, and where schoolchildren have local role models to inspire them. This is what the people of Ynys Môn want, this is what the people of Ynys Môn deserve, and, working with the UK Government, this is what I aim to deliver.

7.41 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Today's theme of making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old made me think back to my childhood. I grew up a stone's throw from where I still live in Swansea East—a proud working-class area, as it still is today. We did not have a lot but we had enough, and that is the difference.

I am honoured to represent my local community and delighted to be able to help those in need. With the summer lunch club fast approaching, my team are working out how many children we can realistically feed through that scheme. We are already looking ahead to Christmas to try to establish whether we will need to help more than the 2,000 families we helped last year. While I am privileged to be able to use my platform to do this, it breaks my heart that I have to. If we are serious about making Britain the best place to grow up in, the Government need to do more—much, much more—to tackle the food poverty and social injustice that we all see in our constituencies every day.

Despite many promises in the Royal Address, words alone do nothing: action on promises is what is needed. Warm words are not delivering on the assurances by this Government that menopausal women in England would have to pay only one annual fee for their HRT prescription. The announcement was made in October 2021 but it now looks as if it will not happen until April 2023. That is not what was said, not what was anticipated, and not what the women who attended this place on that day to welcome the Government's commitment believed. As a result, I, other colleagues across the House and very many menopause campaigners, groups and individuals have recently launched the menopause mandate, which aims to add our voice to make sure that there is fair and equal access to menopause support and services right across the country. I am not even going to start on the HRT supply shortage, which I have written to the Health Secretary about on so many occasions that I was beginning to think we had started a pen-pal relationship—although his lack of response obviously makes it a one-sided arrangement.

There were glimmers of hope in the Queen's Speech, but they were just glimmers. Primarily, there was the commitment to publish draft legislation to reform the Mental Health Act 1983. As a woman who spent 12 years on antidepressants after wrongly self-diagnosing a nervous breakdown and depression instead of what it was—the menopause—I know how vital it is that links are made between the two. I am pleased that depression is listed as a clinical indicator on the quality and outcomes framework, but I am disappointed that menopause is not. I am not being critical of depression being on there, or of the fact that doctors are incentivised to diagnose and treat it; what concerns me is what is being missed. All too often, anxiety and depression are diagnosed when menopause is the problem. It is really important that the similarities and links between menopause and mental health are better understood by medical practitioners. The Government have an opportunity

[Carolyn Harris]

here, through the proposed changes to the Mental Health Act, to include the menopause and the impact it has on mental health in that piece of legislation.

I am truly passionate about making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old in. I have been called a lot of things in my time—the sandwich lady, the menopause lady and, if you listen to the gambling lobby, a prohibitionist and a Methodist, as well as quite a few other things that I cannot say in this Chamber—but in last week's debate on the Queen's Speech, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) gave me perhaps my favourite title when she referred to me as

“a pain in the Government's neck”.—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2022; Vol. 714, c. 11.]

I am very proud of that and, for the record, I fully intend to continue that trait.

7.46 pm

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris).

This Queen's Speech promises to deliver an agenda that reflects the ambition and aspirations of the British people. Our debate today focuses on some of the most significant periods of our lives—growing up and growing old—and the Bills in the Queen's Speech will make Britain an even better place to do both.

Education is the ultimate expression of levelling up. It is good not just for our employment prospects but for our wellbeing and personal development. It is good not just for the individual but for the economy and society. Einstein said:

“Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of minds to think.”

An educated, thinking population creates a productive, dynamic, innovative and entrepreneurial population capable of meeting the challenges of this country, so I am pleased to see in this Queen's Speech the Government's determination to deliver an education for all ages, whether you are starting out at a primary school, a student at the local technical college or in your 40s or 50s wanting to retrain and learn new skills.

My constituency has superb grammar schools that consistently feature among the top state schools in the country, but as well as pure academic qualifications, we also need young people with the technical and vocational skills fit for the modern economy. Buckinghamshire University Technical College, with its offer of health and digital courses, is an excellent place for children in my constituency to learn those skills and it is one that I am proud to champion. Bucks College is an enthusiastic advocate and adopter of T-levels, a qualification that—like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education—I want to see as famous and respected as A-levels.

The Schools Bill promises to help every child to fulfil their potential by raising standards. As a former school governor, I have seen at first hand how joining a strong multi-academy trust can enable schools to flourish as they benefit from high standards and expectations. This is exactly what far more schools will do with this legislation. I am also pleased that the Department for Education has published a SEND Green Paper. My constituency has excellent volunteer organisations such

as GRASPS—Greater Resources for Autism Supporting Parents and Siblings—which help parents to navigate the minefield of education, health and care plans. Many parents have come to my office in sheer desperation trying to resolve difficulties with EHCPs, and I am glad that the Government—particularly the Minister sitting on the Front Bench, the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince)—are working really hard to improve this. I would respectfully urge Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that the NHS plays its part in ensuring that children with special educational needs and disabilities are treated as they should be. Sadly, all too often the delays and difficulties that I see stem from health rather than from education.

Growing up is not just about getting good exam results, a great apprenticeship or a job; it is also about becoming a rounded adult, confident and secure in oneself. That is why I am delighted to see the inclusion in the Queen's Speech of the conversion therapy Bill, which will ban frankly evil and abhorrent practices that are intended to change sexual orientation. We all need to be free to love who we want to love. For too many of us, it took too long to be able to do that: too long to accept ourselves for who we are and too long for others to accept us. Let us hope that this Bill will be another step to enable today's generation of young people to feel safe and secure in acknowledging and expressing their sexuality.

We are often keen to talk about the delights and opportunities of childhood, but less enthusiastic about confronting some of the challenges of growing old. Too often, elderly people are almost hidden from view. So I am extremely pleased that the Government are putting older people at the heart of their plans for social care, with a comprehensive vision and substantial investment, coupled with the massive commitment to the NHS through funding, recruitment and the construction of new hospitals.

No one can deny that we face difficult times in the months ahead, but with the measures announced in the Queen's Speech our country is equipped to encounter any challenge and any adversary, with skill, experience and expertise; with resilience, enthusiasm and true British grit.

7.50 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): This Queen's Speech shows that the Government either do not understand or do not care about the lives of my constituents in Nottingham South. At the top of their agenda, but sadly not the Government's, is practical action to address the soaring cost of living crisis.

Take my constituent, a single mum of two living in privately rented accommodation. Despite working full time, when her wage goes in and her rent and bills are paid, she has just £75 a month left over to feed and clothe her family, including two teenagers. She told me that

“my daughter came home from school worried because she had a cookery exam and didn't want to tell me because she was worried about me having to spend more on the shopping list for her ingredients. Can you imagine how, as a mother, that made me feel?”

I am sure you will agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the situation my constituent faces is not her fault, and that young people should not face those worries.

Rents and prices are rising fast, energy bills are skyrocketing and wages are not keeping pace. Yet the Government chose to scrap the uplift in universal credit and to raise national insurance contributions. I do not hold the Government responsible for global price rises, but I do hold them responsible for 12 years of failure, for making a difficult situation worse, and for failing to act now to protect those who are least able to withstand economic shocks.

Instead of listening and acting, Ministers and Government MPs lecture people, telling them that they would be fine if only they bought value brands, cooked better or improved their budgeting. They patronise people, saying, “Work longer hours or get a better paid job.” If they really cared about pay and job security, the Queen’s Speech would have included legislation to protect workers from unscrupulous employment practices, action to deliver affordable childcare and measures to enable parents to better combine work and care. It did not. Some members of the Government seem determined to add insult by injury, demanding that people stop working from home and instead spend even more time and money commuting.

For children growing up in Tory Britain, life is getting harder. The Resolution Foundation predicts that by 2024-25, more than one in three children will be living in poverty. Well, in Nottingham South they already are. That is almost 6,000 children in my constituency being let down by this Government.

There is nothing graceful about growing old in Tory Britain either. We are now at the point where many older people who have worked and paid taxes their whole lives are having to choose between heating and eating as pensions fail to keep pace with rising prices. Research by Age UK shows that three quarters of older people in the UK are worried about the rising cost of living, and a quarter of older people have said that if energy bills increase substantially, as we expect they inevitably will, they will choose between heating their home and buying food. Some of the poorest pensioners are already cold and hungry.

The Government should have used the Queen’s Speech to introduce an emergency Budget, including a windfall tax on oil and gas companies’ near-record profits, to get money off people’s bills, but they did not. They should have announced investment in energy efficiency measures, matching Labour’s plans to insulate 19 million homes in a decade, which would reduce gas imports, make homes warmer and cut bills while helping to tackle the climate crisis and create new jobs. They chose not to.

On the cost of living, on support for workers, on energy efficiency, security and sustainability, on their record NHS waiting lists, on social care and on vital public services, including youth clubs, libraries, road maintenance, parks and so much more, this Government have failed. My constituents deserve so much better, but I am afraid that they will not get it under the Conservatives.

7.55 pm

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this Queen’s Speech debate on making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old, and to follow the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). With 38 Bills in the Queen’s Speech, covering a wide range of topics from crime and disorder to education, the economy and the cost of living, there

will be much legislating to do in the next several months, but today I will focus on the transport Bill, the data reform Bill and the financial services and markets Bill.

Improved public transport infrastructure and services are vital to ensuring that this country is a good place to grow up with opportunities for all. The proposed transport Bill will create Great British Railways, which I hope will overcome some of the current fragmentation, including that between the Wales and borders franchise and the rest of Great Britain’s network. Our nearest major cities of Manchester and Liverpool and their airports can be reached in just over an hour by road, on average, from Rhyl in my constituency. In comparison, rail services take about two hours, yet a similar distance by rail in the south-east of Britain can take as little as 40 minutes.

Poor regional rail services stifle economic growth, including in our vital tourism sector, suppress efforts to reduce higher-than-average unemployment, and result in just 2% of commutes to the north-west of England being by rail—some 80% less than the national average. I urge the Government to ensure that the rail infrastructure improvements that north Wales requires are placed in the soon-to-be-updated rail network enhancements pipeline at the “decision to develop” stage.

The transport Bill is expected to contain provisions to enable the installation of more electric vehicle charge points, a move that is very much needed locally. I hope that the Bill will also contain provisions to bring “UKNET” into being—a strategic transport network for the whole UK, as recommended in the Union connectivity review.

I believe that the data reform Bill has the potential to empower citizens and improve their lives via more effective delivery of public healthcare, security and Government services. Requiring UK-wide comparable and interoperable data within our public services, but particularly the NHS, could help to identify unacceptable performance, allow learning from best practice, and drive improvement and change. It would also better enable the electorate to identify success or failure and hold politicians to account accordingly.

We must remember that cash remains an important part of life for millions of people across the UK, particularly those in vulnerable groups, as they grow up and grow old. ATMs remain the most popular way of withdrawing cash, but their numbers have been in decline recently. I have experience of that in my constituency: on Prestatyn’s high street, the number of ATMs dropped from six to zero because of the rapid closure of several banks. Cash is still important for many residents and companies in my constituency, especially the independent businesses on the high street. Following a campaign, and thanks to Cardtronics, three new cash machines have now been installed in the town centre. I welcome the fact that the financial services and markets Bill will protect cash by ensuring continued access to withdrawal and deposit facilities across the UK. It is important that the Bill be delivered as soon as possible so that existing cash infrastructure can be protected.

I hope that the legislation will set out that LINK be formally regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority to ensure access to cash, whether through mandating the installation of ATMs, recommending new banking hubs or requiring enhanced post office services. It should also ensure that communities such as Prestatyn that lost banking services before 2022, rather than only those that lose branches after the Bill is on the statute book,

[Dr James Davies]

will potentially qualify for a hub. Consideration should be given to the ongoing availability of Welsh language banking service provision in a community—a concern that Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych has emphasised in correspondence with me, particularly in relation to the town of Denbigh.

The Queen's Speech delivers a promising set of Bills that will help to ensure that Britain remains one of the best places to grow up and grow old. I look forward to helping to shape the legislation as it progresses through Parliament.

7.59 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): We cannot provide equal opportunities and a stimulating environment throughout life that will enable people to live truly fulfilling lives while we continue to have such high levels of poverty and insecurity and while we continue to support a society where greed is good and poverty is rife. Research provided by Independent Age in partnership with City, University of London, tracked the financial health of people past state pension age between 2010 and 2019, and the most shocking finding was that 40% of pensioners spent at least one year in poverty during that nine-year period.

The Queen's Speech was a missed opportunity to introduce immediate measures that could help to alleviate the devastating effects of the cost of living crisis, including a commitment to ensure that pension credit reaches those who are entitled to it. Increases in social benefit income from things such as pension credit are a crucial factor in helping older people escape poverty, and that is particularly true among people aged 75-plus. As take-up remains stagnant, research from Loughborough University, commissioned by Independent Age, estimates that the lack of take-up costs the Treasury £4 billion per year in increased NHS and social care spending.

At the other end of life's journey, 4.3 million children were living in poverty in the UK before the pandemic. That was up 200,000 from the previous year and, according to Action for Children, up 500,000 over the past five years, which is 31% of children—if Ministers are listening, that is 31% of children. Almost 60% of all children in poverty in Scotland live in a family where a child is under six, and the Scottish Government have reacted positively. Since August 2021, all councils have offered 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare for all eligible children, making high-quality early learning and childcare available to families and saving parents up to £4,900 per year for each eligible child.

The SNP is proud to be delivering on manifesto promises. The provision of free school breakfasts and lunches all year round for all children in primary 1 to 7, digital services for every poor child, the abolition of fees for instrumental music tuition and the removal of core curriculum charges are feeding their bellies and their minds. Barbara Crowther, the co-ordinator of the children's food campaign, has said that universal free meals for primary schools

“could be a valuable and cost-effective lifeline for families at a difficult economic time.”

What about all those families that are struggling now and were struggling before covid or the energy price increases? Who do they turn to? A few days ago, the

Chancellor tried to explain why he could not adjust welfare. He blamed the computer system at its core, yet whenever I have questioned the suitability and indeed the flexibility of the existing welfare system over the last seven years, I have always been told, “It's doing its job, it's just fine. Move along—nothing to see here.” It clearly is not, yet possible solutions once again are ignored, dismissed as fanciful and never fully investigated.

I know it is a concept the UK Government scorn, but councils in all four nations want to trial universal basic income, and only by trials will we be able to value its pros and cons. The UK Government should not fear the outcomes of these trials; they should be instructing the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to work with council authorities so we can learn and improve based on solid data and academic research, not the prejudice and misconceptions that beset the current welfare system. Welfare must be designed to provide security and confidence, not to punish and stigmatise.

The UK's big idea to resolve the disparity of rich and poor is levelling up. While the UK Government will point to levelling up as an example of stimulus, it prompts the question: if our society is so equal, why do we need levelling up and why are we not already level? Unless we address those issues of poverty, deprivation and a lack of aspiration, with lives wasted and unfulfilled, everything else is smoke and mirrors. If all the stated goals are to have any credence, they must be rooted in a fair society, and one with equal access to education, health, energy, food and transport.

When Beveridge wrote his report to design a post-world war two welfare system for the United Kingdom, he said:

“A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching.”

This is such a time. As we emerge from a worldwide pandemic and the gig economy increases, we need a revolution in welfare. In an increasingly unequal society, the UK Government would do well to listen. Now is the time for big ideas, and the Queen's Speech was sadly lacking in any.

8.4 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): The Queen's Speech contains a wealth of proposals that broadly fall between how we best support the vast majority of our people for whom things such as state-funded education and state-funded healthcare are important, and how we support and focus on those who need the intervention of the state to thrive.

I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) in congratulating our colleagues, the re-elected leader of Hillingdon Council, Ian Edwards, and the newly elected leader of Harrow Council, Paul Osborn. Local government is often the vehicle through which the state supports both the most vulnerable and our communities, which is the theme I hope to develop in my brief contribution tonight.

I commend Ministers for their work on special educational needs and disabilities in the Schools Bill. I know they spend a lot of time engaging with people across the sector, and it is clear to us all that, if we are to make sure that every child has the chance to thrive, a

change is urgently required. Despite the welcome reforms that have been introduced, the system remains enormously challenged.

The Schools Bill will also begin to create a more level playing field between different types of schools, and it offers an opportunity to ensure that state-funded education gives every child in England the best start in life. This will be debated, but I particularly welcome the Government's proposals to enable local authorities to set up multi-academy trusts. Research by the Local Government Association, based on previous research by organisations such as Watchsted, shows that there remains a significant advantage for maintained schools and that local authorities remain more effective than academy trusts in improving the attainment of struggling schools. We need to make sure we can harness that to the best advantage of all our communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) spoke about the importance of the human rights review. As a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, I have heard a lot of representations on the review over the past few months. It is very important that we get it right and that we reflect the need to update our human rights legislation to take account of, for example, the growing impact of the online world on how people live their lives, but I echo the concerns about ensuring that we do not displace the problem by sending cases to Strasbourg that we could more effectively deal with at UK level.

For many aspects of our economy, education, local government and healthcare, we need to recognise that the trend of working from home has been embraced by the most productive, most efficient and most profitable parts of our economy, particularly in professional services. We can help the money we spend on taxpayer-funded services go even further by making sure that people who can work from home most efficiently do so, while making sure that those who need to be in the office to provide frontline face-to-face public services are where they are required.

It is important the House recognises that for the local authority with the greatest proportion of residents accessing some form of social care, at any stage of their life's journey, the figure is less than one in five residents, but those residents are often the most vulnerable. Ministers in the Department for Education have been considering how to review and improve our children's social care system and update safeguarding to reflect the challenges of the modern world. I urge them to look at the Crocker review of private equity, which considers the cost of providing children's social care, and I hope they will find time to answer the call from the Children's Commissioner that England should follow Wales and Scotland in abolishing the reasonable chastisement defence in respect of the disciplining of children.

Finally, on growing old, I encourage the Government to look in all their endeavours at a public health approach to ageing, so that we consider how local authorities can encourage activity such as walking football, bowls and swimming to keep our older citizens active. There is so much potential to show our pride in our communities and our ambition for them. The public will find much of that on the Conservative Benches tonight.

8.9 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): On the Opposition Benches, we have been hearing about the cost of living crisis. We hear about it in the media, from our constituents and on the news. We hear about it constantly, but it feels like it is somehow falling on deaf ears, because in the Queen's Speech the Government failed to address it.

It is with shock and horror that we hear that because of the cost of living crisis 1.3 million people in the UK are set to fall below the poverty line next year, including 500,000 children who will experience severe poverty. If we look at that in more detail, it will affect what children eat, the quality of their food, the size of their portions and perhaps the frequency with which they eat. It will affect their ability to be warm in their home. It could affect their clothing and how much clothing is purchased for them, as we heard from other Members. It could affect their health—we heard from other Members about obesity being linked to poverty. There are many areas where children will experience deprivation and disadvantage, but it seems like the Government are set to be okay on that. Before the cost of living crisis even hit, 3,500 children in Lewisham were already in absolute poverty. That figure is rising and is only set to increase further. The Government must get a grip on the cost of living so that our young children will not suffer.

If children are experiencing deprivation and disadvantage and are going to be in severe poverty, some costs will only be passed on to another area. If the Government invested now, they would be doing what is right now rather than passing certain costs on to the health service because of health issues, on to the criminal justice system because a rise in poverty often leads to an increase in crime, and on to children's social care because the chances are that more intervention from public services will be needed. As we know, local authorities are already suffering. Those costs are being passed on, so why are the Government not making the choice to invest now in people's lives, rather than being in the situation of controlling people's lives?

It is vital that we protect children and new parents. Early years learning is essential to ensure that children have the best possible start in life and the Government need to get it right for all children. The Government should aim for state education to be as good as grammar schools and private schools. Each child, including SEND children, should have an equal chance of success. The Government clearly have a long way to go to achieve that.

In addition to education, older children are often perceived and managed negatively by the police and the criminal justice system, and that can affect their wellbeing and health. Many older children's interaction with the justice system can leave them traumatised and with a negative experience of the police. We need only to look at child Q for evidence of that. There are many examples of stopping and searching young black men and women in London in particular, and we know those situations are detrimental to their health. We only need to look at Bianca Williams, the Commonwealth gold medallist, when she had that awful experience of a roadside stop.

There are stories of children across the UK being held for up to 18 hours in custody in a police cell. That is shockingly long—it should be a shock for everybody who hears it for the first time. Current legislation requires

[Janet Daby]

that they be detained only as a last resort for the shortest appropriate period. That is clearly not happening. Young people have described the experience as horrible and devastating. I am standing with Vicky Kemp, a principal research fellow at the University of Nottingham who specialises in this area, to press the Government to cut the statutory stay limit for children from 24 hours to 12 hours. I really hope the Government are listening.

According to a report by the Children's Commissioner, the average waiting time for an appropriate adult is nine hours. My 15-year-old constituent was detained for nine hours before his mother was even called to be informed that he was in a police cell. I am campaigning with the National Appropriate Adult Network to speed up the attendance of appropriate adults coming to young people's aid in a police cell. The Government must ensure that children are treated as children within the care of public bodies and in the care of the police.

8.14 pm

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): It is a great privilege to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby). Making the UK the best place to grow up and grow old is an ambitious target, but we are definitely closer to it following this year's Queen Speech. In my opinion and that of a lot of the people who live in Cornwall, it already is, but there is still a huge amount to do. A lot of work is going on in Cornwall. We have secured a new secondary school near Perranporth on the north coast and we are expecting a new women and children's hospital to arrive at the Treliske site.

I would like to focus today on the brilliant work of some of my Truro and Falmouth constituents. Last month, I was delighted to welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) to the Falmouth family hub to show some of the best practice of our excellent early years teams, led by Meredith Teasdale and Councillor Barbara Ellenbroek. Cornwall is one of the 75 local authorities to receive Treasury funding as part of the vital best start for life programme.

We began by visiting team members from WILD, the largest young parents charity in the UK. That organisation works with Cornwall Council to ensure that young parents and their babies have the best possible start to family life. We were lucky enough to see messy play and sensory play with bubbles, paint, water and foam that would make any mother twitch. Thank goodness that the facilities they have to do that are not in my house.

I know that I speak for all parents in this debate when I say that becoming a new parent is incredibly challenging and daunting. Although, for many people, becoming a parent means that their hopes and dreams have come true, it is never easy and a bit of extra support can go an awful long way. However, for younger parents and those with no support network, that extra help is absolutely vital. That is why the work of WILD, which has supported more than 13,000 mums, dads and children over the years, is so important. For example, its healthy start programme helps young parents to transition into becoming a new parent. Its infant mental health project helps to improve mental health and the wellbeing of babies and toddlers, and its first steps project focuses on children

with the highest needs, in line with the early years foundation stage framework. These teams' incredible work, along with Cornwall Council, puts Cornwall on the map for early years work. I urge the Government to consider Cornwall as a trailblazer local authority, where we could secure extra funds to excel and share our best practices with other localities.

Moving on to the later stages of life, I draw the attention of the Secretary of State and the Minister to the HAIRE—Healthy Ageing through Innovation in Rural Europe—project. It does a brilliant job in supporting rural communities with an ever-increasing ageing population facing significant health and care challenges and determining what services really make a difference in ruralities. Working together with me and Feock parish council, the HAIRE team—one of only two in the United Kingdom—has done brilliant work locally to develop an environment in the community that supports and encourages older people to feel engaged and part of their locality. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), if people can live healthily in their own home, they get much better health outcomes.

From speaking to the HAIRE team, it is clear that more needs to be done to promote healthy ageing in rural communities. I will focus briefly on the need for the Government to actively develop varied and effective accommodation, potentially, for elderly residents. It will come as no surprise to everyone in the Chamber to hear that housing is the No.1 issue for my Cornwall constituents. Only 2.5% of the UK's 29 million dwellings are defined as retirement housing and the stock is heavily skewed towards houses with three or four bedrooms.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) mentioned, the Government must increase the proportion of the housing stock for people of retirement age and encourage those who are over 65 in properties with surplus bedrooms to downsize—that is, those who wish to. That will allow younger families to upsize, reduce the pressure to build more houses—therefore easing the housing crisis—and improve health and wellbeing for older residents. By the way, not all retired people want to live in retirement villages only with other retired people. Some want to live with families and children and see them play and see everyday life. I am driving at the fact that we need the Bills in this Queen's Speech to promote what we Conservatives do best: look after our communities. Cornwall absolutely shone the light during covid to show what communities can do, and we need to learn from the good practice here. Making the UK the best place to grow up and grow well is a challenging task, and I know that this Government will rise to it. Supporting the fantastic local initiatives and ensuring that our housing stock works for everyone will play essential parts in achieving that goal, for all our families and for all of our communities.

8.19 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): When I was thinking about what to say in a debate on making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old, the first two constituents who came to mind were Lee and Philip, who were both born with foetal valproate syndrome. They will have a lifelong need for care and support, and for their parents it is a worry to think about them growing up. They have already had their childhood—they

are adults—but they are living with lifelong disabilities. As the Minister for Health is on the Treasury Bench, I am going to take the opportunity to make the case that for victims of sodium valproate we need a redress scheme, similar to that for victims of thalidomide, to ensure that that lifelong care is in place and so that we can somewhat ease the worry that parents of these children—and young adults now—are living with.

Last week, I visited Beaumont College in Lancaster, as well Lancaster & Morecambe College and the new youth hub in Fleetwood. It was great to hear from those young people, but it strikes me that there is something missing from the Queen's Speech: any mention of youth work and the way in which it can support our children in education and support our young people growing up. At a recent question and answer session with pupils at Cardinal Allen Catholic High School in Fleetwood, the message was clear; they wanted better access to mental health support, and their teachers agreed. They told me what we all already know: the child and adolescent mental health services waiting list is unacceptably long and the thresholds to meet their care are unacceptably high.

The Queen's Speech confirmed that the Government plan to introduce a Schools Bill. These reforms come at a crucial time for our education system, but I have met many local headteachers and they tell me that the Bill fails to deliver on the key challenges that our schools are facing. It is indifferent to the issues of mental health and wellbeing. It doubles down on the failures of the past; setting a new target for standard assessment test performance that will not raise the quality of education. It singles out student attendance for attention, while overlooking the problems of mental health and the exam factory culture that contribute to poor attendance.

Lancaster and Fleetwood is a great place to grow up because it is a great place to learn. I am fortunate enough to have two brilliant universities in my constituency: Lancaster University and the University of Cumbria. I have had the pleasure of meeting students and researchers at Lancaster University who are pioneering research across diverse areas, from flood defences to gaining a better understanding of Alzheimer's. Given that some 18,000 people are living with dementia in Lancashire, it is something that helps to bridge what can sometimes be a gap between the town and the gown in our community. But with the higher education Bill, we would see restrictions on who has access to this brilliant education on the basis of people's GCSEs. To those who say that too many young people are going to university nowadays, I ask, "How can it be a bad thing that people are getting more education?". Education enriches not only the lives of the individuals who receive it, but the communities they live in, and it changes lives for the better.

Lancaster and Fleetwood is a great place to grow up because it is a great place to work. My constituency is full of brilliant local businesses, ranging from small independent retailers to international businesses such as Fisherman's Friend. But the reality for many in rural communities is that they feel disconnected from work opportunities. The Queen's Speech promises a transport Bill that will "take control" of the railway system. My question on railways is simple: we have been campaigning hard to get our railway reopened in Fleetwood and it was promised to us about two years ago, but what is happening? Where is it? Will this Bill reconnect Fleetwood to the rail network or is this something else that has

become derailed by this Government? We should not lose sight of the importance of local bus networks too. For many of my constituents it might be a question of travelling from Dolphinholme into Lancaster or Glasson Dock into Galgate, and those rural bus networks have suffered huge cuts. My constituents feel disconnected from access to jobs and access to social and family events.

Lancaster and Fleetwood is a great place to grow old, because people of every age and stage are embraced as part of the community; we see this in everything from the parent and toddler group at Lancaster Methodist church to the Wyre Wheels project that takes place every Friday in Memorial park in Fleetwood and supports anyone of any ability, even me, to get active on bikes and cycle. It is a resourceful community and it is certainly a compassionate one. Sadly, in the past few weeks I have received so many emails from constituents who are concerned about the rising cost of their bills and the fact that their pensions are not keeping up with these costs. My rural constituents, especially those with oil-powered heating, have been left out of Government support.

I implore those on the Treasury Bench to bear in mind the importance of remembering everyone in every community in Britain, and to ensure that Britain really is the best place in which to grow up and grow old.

8.24 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): Since the last Queen's Speech, Southport has begun the process of seismic change, with our £37.5 million town deal being met with hundreds of millions in pledged private funding. The town deal will ultimately help to create more than 1,300 new jobs, and will bring in over a million extra visitors per year. From the individual small businesses springing up along our high street to the larger Southport Cove and Marine Lake Events Centre developments, our wonderful town—which I am proud to call my home—is rightly seeing the benefits of the Government's levelling-up agenda.

It is important for local communities to have a say in changes in their areas, and I therefore welcome the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, which offers a real opportunity to address the housing shortage. While the Bill will also allow a further devolution of powers over local services to local elected leaders, I urge the Government to go further, and introduce a mechanism to allow a community to change its local authority catchment area more easily.

In Southport we have been held back repeatedly by the vindictive actions of Labour-led Sefton Council, which takes resources away from Southport and ignores local concerns about, for example, unwanted, unnecessary and unwelcome cycle lanes. Furthermore, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Children and Families knows, we discovered in the days conveniently after the local elections that Sefton Council's children's services had been rated "inadequate" by Ofsted in all areas, yet the responsible councillors shamelessly remain in office, and Southport's vulnerable children continue to suffer. These children deserve excellent services from their local council, just as they deserve excellent healthcare from their local NHS. Such healthcare is crucial throughout life, and while I welcome the Government's commitment to clear the backlog from covid, we must aim for more

[*Damien Moore*]

than simply returning to where we were before the pandemic hit and restrictions came into force. As my other hon. Friend the Minister for Health knows, Southport Hospital has been lacking a children's A&E since 2003, with services rolled into Ormskirk Hospital. During covid, however, Ormskirk's children's A&E has stopped providing a 24-hour service, with the result that a child who falls sick out of hours must now travel to Liverpool. First we must see the resumption of the 24/7 service in Ormskirk, and then, most important, we must see the return of this service to Southport.

We must ensure that all people in this country, from the day they are born, are given the support they deserve. We must ensure that children are given the best possible start. We must ensure that the UK remains the best place in which to grow up. Education is crucial to allowing people to prosper and succeed, especially as we build back better from covid, so it is welcome that the Schools Bill will strengthen our education system. While Labour-led Sefton Council is content with failing to help children, this Conservative Government will use the Bill to level up opportunity, supporting children throughout the country.

However, we are not stopping there. The higher education Bill will raise education standards and increase fairness within the system, allowing students to fulfil their potential wherever they live. Southport benefits greatly when well-qualified graduates return to our town, as their innovative drive and passion for local progress are crucial to our success. For example, Southport's hospitality developments need look no further than Southport College, where, under the fantastic leadership of Michelle Brabner, students are well supported in finding skilled, well-paid work locally.

All this relies on strong transport links. We need the Burscough Curves rail link to reopen, which would enable stronger connectivity not only within the region, but as far afield as Scotland and the south of England. We need to maintain the direct link from Southport to Manchester Piccadilly, which is crucial for jobs, businesses and leisure. I am optimistic that the transport Bill will succeed in its stated aim of making our transport system more reliable and efficient for passengers.

This Queen's Speech brings welcome legislation to my constituency in particular, and I look forward to supporting the Government as we continue to level up our local areas, support our children, and connect our communities.

8.29 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southport (Damien Moore), who is clearly a passionate supporter of Southport. I congratulate him: I am sure he will do well in today's Conservative party.

This Queen's Speech fails to address the immediate cost of living crisis and does little to end the longer-term issues of growing poverty and inequality in Wales as in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is the context of this debate and the cause of the hollow laughter at its title, "Making Britain the Best Place to Grow Up and Grow Old". In Wales, we have high levels of poverty, and we have done for decades, particularly since the

destruction of our heavy industries by the Conservative Governments of the 1980s. That is why we qualified for EU support on a par with the former Soviet bloc countries of the east—that is, until we were blessed with Brexit opportunities, when that support diminished.

Our levels of child poverty in Wales are the highest in the UK, affecting a third of Welsh children, as measured in 2019. As the Children's Commissioner for Wales said over the weekend, the rate is now likely to be around 40%. This persistent poverty has consequences for children's development, including damaging their mental health, and those consequences carry on into adulthood. At this point, if the Whips are listening, I would like to congratulate the Government on their intention to bring in a mental health Bill and say that, as a former social worker approved under the Mental Health Act 1983, I would be very glad of the opportunity to contribute to the scrutiny of that Bill.

Poverty carries on down the generations, but not, as some would have it, as something inherently bad or morally reprehensible about working people. It is poverty that damages lives and it is poverty that kills. The cost of living crisis is having a devastating impact on children all over Wales and elsewhere in the UK, and families are being forced to choose between eating and heating. Wales has the highest rate of food bank use in the UK, with over 4,000 food parcels distributed per 100,000 people per annum. People are turning to food banks because they have no other choice.

The cut of £20 per week to universal credit, which took away £286 million from the Welsh economy, was an utter disaster for children in low-income families. As to adults in Wales, one in three people of working age and almost one in five pensioners die in poverty. That is the highest rate in the UK. This disgraceful Victorian value must be banished for good. Smoking is the largest single cause of avoidable early death in Wales, and Plaid Cymru supports the introduction of a "polluter pays" levy on tobacco manufacturers to raise funds for tobacco control, to ensure that our smoke-free ambition for Wales is met.

The real game changer for Wales would be the devolution of social security so that we can build a system of support that meets our particular needs. Control over the administration of benefits would create a more flexible approach at a time when families need it most—for example, paying universal credit weekly to reflect the way that poor people have to budget and changing the current degrading sanctions regime. Welfare support could be delivered to meet the actual needs of people in Wales, with winter fuel payments linked to home energy efficiency. Cold weather payments could be improved to take into account rurality, which has particular effects on people in the uplands of my own constituency of Arfon. Devolution would enable us to create new ways of helping to top up existing benefits. We in Plaid Cymru believe that our Senedd should create a Welsh child payment similar to that in Scotland, and much more.

Carol Monaghan: One of the difficulties is that only a very small proportion of benefits—about 15%—have been devolved to the Scottish Government. With the situation that the hon. Gentleman is talking about, all benefits would need to be devolved so that they could be properly administered.

Hywel Williams: I share the ambition of the hon. Lady and her colleagues to have a proper social security system that is tailored to the needs of our communities. The Scottish Government are leading the way, as far as I am concerned, and when we have that power, we will be emulating some of the measures that they have brought in.

Wales comes way down the priority list of this Conservative Government, whose eyes are glued both on their vulnerable red wall seats and their increasingly unhappy homelands in the south and east of England. But Plaid Cymru advocates bold policies for everyone, which will make Wales a good place to grow old and to grow up.

8.34 pm

Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con): The pandemic has been particularly difficult for young people. Research by the Education Policy Institute has shown that, despite the best efforts of teachers over the last two years, pupils have lost the equivalent of more than four months of learning, with those in the north and midlands most affected. There is a real danger that covid will end up exacerbating long-standing inequalities. According to the latest Ofsted inspection reports, only 55% of Derbyshire secondary schools are rated good or better, compared with the national benchmark of 80%. This inequality in opportunity simply is not good enough. We must do better.

In High Peak, we are making progress, with St Philip Howard Catholic Voluntary Academy in Glossop being upgraded to good in its latest Ofsted inspection, compared with its 2018 rating of requires improvement. We also secured capital funding to invest in Hope Valley College and to expand Harpur Hill Primary in Buxton. The £4 million expansion of Glossopdale School is under construction, which will create an extra 240 places for the town, due in September.

However, more can and must be done. So I welcome that the Government have designated Derbyshire as one of the new education investment areas, which means that Derbyshire schools will receive much-needed extra support, with additional money for the recruitment and retention of the best teachers. The Queen's Speech aims to build on that progress with the Schools Bill to help drive up standards.

Our schools are not the only public service challenged by the pandemic. The NHS is still grappling with a huge covid backlog. A good example is the withdrawal of the mobile breast cancer screening unit in High Peak in 2020. I fought hard to get that vital service reinstated, and I am pleased to report that the mobile unit is back up and running locally, operating at 160% of pre-pandemic levels. However, we must do more than simply restore services if we are to build a more resilient, preventive health service. That is why I am pushing so hard for new urgent care centres for both Stepping Hill Hospital and Tameside Hospital. It is also why I am supporting Derbyshire Community Health Services bid for capital funding for a major new health centre for Buxton.

Of course, not all illnesses are visible. As we rebuild from the pandemic, we must deliver parity between mental and physical health services. The proposed Bill to reform the Mental Health Act will play a key role in this mission, giving patients greater control over their treatment and ensuring that they receive a more personalised

level of care. I recently visited the construction site of the £4.8 million highly specialist mental health unit that is being built at Tameside Hospital. That will replace the existing psychiatric intensive care unit at Stepping Hill, providing short-term care for men over the age of 18 experiencing mental health distress. Once that new unit is built at Tameside, the current psychiatric intensive care unit at Stepping Hill will be refurbished to create a unit specifically for women. That is particularly good news given that this service is not currently available anywhere locally. It will allow women to receive specialist mental health care closer to their homes and loved ones.

Turning to social care, I am pleased that this Government have finally grasped the nettle and introduced reforms to try to ensure that no one will have to sell their home to pay for care in future. While those reforms are welcome, we need to get on with delivery and fleshing out the details of the improvement plans.

Tackling any of these challenges is only possible if we have strong public finances to pay for the world-class public services that we need, and that requires a strong and growing economy. As we all know, we are facing global rising energy prices, a war in Europe and we are still dealing with the enormous supply chain disruption caused by covid, all of which are driving high inflation and the rising cost of living. The Government's long-term reform plans are the right ones, investing in infrastructure, skills and public service reform to create sustainable growth and well-paid high-skilled jobs, but we need to think very carefully about what more can be done in the short term to help people to cope with soaring costs now.

There are no magic solutions and those Members who pretend otherwise are deluding themselves and the people they represent. That does not mean that we cannot do more. We need honesty, creativity, pragmatism and compassion to deal with the challenges ahead. If we work together, I am confident that we will succeed. I am glad that the Queen's Speech put forward a series of practical measures to make Britain the best place to grow up and grow old.

8.39 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): This Gracious Speech should have been an opportunity for the Government to rise to the unprecedented challenges facing our country and, in doing so, to make Britain the best place to grow up and grow old. Its lack of ambition and its stony silence on some of the biggest challenges facing the UK speak volumes about a Government who are out of touch and out of ideas. Worse still, many of the challenges that we need to address are a direct consequence of 12 years of Tory Government—12 years in which, instead of stepping up with ambition for our country, the Government have run down our public services, undermined our economy, negotiated a disastrous exit from the European Union and mired themselves further and further in defending the indefensible current occupant of No. 10 Downing Street.

Our country has been left lacking resilience, both when the covid-19 pandemic struck and as global factors have brought pressure to bear on the cost of living. The Government cannot always prevent international shocks to our economy, but they have a primary duty to ensure that we are as resilient as possible when they come. In that duty, this Government have failed.

[Helen Hayes]

The UK cannot be the best place in which to grow up or grow old while households across the country are struggling to make ends meet, while parents wake up in the morning and go to bed at night worrying about how they will feed their children and keep a roof over their head, and while pensioners worry about whether they will be able to eat and keep warm. Knocking on doors in my constituency in recent months, I have been really shocked to see increasing numbers of older people coming to the door wearing a coat on cold days. It is shameful that that is happening in Britain in the 21st century.

The Queen's Speech includes new Bills to reform the regulation of social housing and private renting. Such legislation is long overdue. Next month is the fifth anniversary of the horrific Grenfell Tower fire, but tenants still cannot have confidence that changes have been made that will protect them. In the private rented sector, I have been calling for an end to section 21 evictions for the past six years, and it is very hard to understand what has taken the Government so long. Alongside the overdue reforms, it is clear that the Government have given up on the large-scale delivery of social housing that is urgently needed to address the housing crisis.

The UK cannot be the best place to grow up while children are condemned to live in poor-quality private rented accommodation that their parents can barely afford to rent or heat. I hope that the Government will consider accepting an amendment to the social housing regulation Bill along the lines proposed in my recent ten-minute rule Bill, the Social Housing (Emergency Protection of Tenancy Rights) Bill, which I called Georgia's law.

Georgia's law recognises the devastating impact that a threat of gang violence can have on family life. When a young person is threatened and their family have to move, they can lose all their stability, be placed in temporary accommodation and end up on a waiting list for a new social housing tenancy for years. That is what happened to my constituent Georgia, with catastrophic consequences for her family. Georgia's law would place new duties on social housing providers to protect the tenancy of a tenant whose family are threatened with violence, helping to limit the harm of gang violence in our communities. It has cross-party support and would make a huge difference.

Finally, as a co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on adult social care, I want to say how utterly unacceptable it is that this Gracious Speech contains no mention of adult social care. The Government have introduced an unfair and unaffordable tax hike, which they justified in terms of the urgent need to provide additional funding for social care. Funding for the NHS is, of course, welcome, although there are far fairer ways to raise it, but the social care sector, which was ignored, neglected and even blamed by the Government during the covid-19 pandemic, and which faces a workforce crisis and a funding crisis, will not receive any funding for at least three years.

The UK cannot possibly be the best place to grow old while across the country people fear losing their homes to pay for their care, and while the workforce tasked with caring for our loved ones are burned out, with staff leaving in their droves to work in retail and distribution because the pay is better. I ask the Government: where is

the ambition? Where is the empathy and insight into the real and intolerable pressures that our communities face? Where are the solutions that we so desperately need to the problems that they have created?

8.43 pm

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate to support the measures in the Queen's Speech, focusing on the core Conservative value of opportunity. Education is key to giving people the best chance to make the most of their talents, and to Britain being the best place to grow up. One of my priorities since being elected has been visiting schools across my constituency to hear directly from teachers, teaching assistants and pupils about the challenges involved in improving literacy and numeracy standards, which are fundamental to young people going on to succeed.

I welcome the Schools Bill, which sets the ambition for 90% of children to achieve expected standards in reading, writing and maths, up from 65% in the most recent year that standard assessment tests took place. It is all very well setting targets, but there needs to be a plan to achieve them. Much will rest on the new parent pledge, which means that any child that falls behind in English or maths should receive additional tailored support. The best schools already do this, and sharing evidence on what works means that more children can now get the support they need and their parents will be more closely involved in their child's progress.

One of the issues most frequently raised during visits to schools is access to speech and language therapy, which others have referred to. Spoken language underpins literacy development. It is key to learning across the curriculum, including in maths. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists highlights evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation that teaching with emphasis on spoken language enables an average of six months' additional academic progress over the course of the year. I welcome the reassurance that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education gave me when the SEND paper was published that the parent pledge should ensure that children who need help with language and communication are supported. One of the calls that the royal college and other language organisations make, which I support, is to ensure that the new national professional qualifications in literacy, special educational needs and early years include a focus on developing and supporting spoken language skills.

As we learn to live with covid, a specific ask from a recent visit to Churchill Park Academy in King's Lynn, which serves young people with special needs, is for tests to be made available for such schools. They have particularly vulnerable pupils who are not currently attending school due to concerns about covid prevalence. I would be grateful if Education and Health Ministers could carefully consider that request.

The focus of this debate, on making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old, also includes access to healthcare. It will come as no surprise to Ministers that I return to an issue I raised in my maiden speech in the first Queen's Speech debate of this Parliament, and indeed in last year's Queen's Speech and on many other occasions—the need for a new Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn. QEH is now more than a decade beyond its planned 30-year lifespan, and due to its reinforced

autoclaved aerated concrete planks, it now has 1,500 timber and steel supports holding up the cracking roof—it is the most-propped hospital in the country—and that number is likely to increase as further failsafe work is completed. Due to this concrete cancer, the trust's risk register has a red rating for direct risk to life and to the safety of patients, visitors and staff due to the potentially catastrophic risk of failure of the roof structure.

Last month, some of my constituents once again came to Westminster talk about the need for QEH to be one of the additional eight new hospital schemes the Government have committed to building. A major issue they asked me to highlight is just how bad an experience being in a ward surrounded by props holding up the roof is for patients. Staff at the hospital stressed how it makes it harder for them to do their job to provide the care the patients need. I warmly welcome the funding from the Department of Health for a new endoscopy unit, and the new west Norfolk eye centre that opened last week at QEH, but now is the time to make a decision to build a new hospital for the 300,000 people across Norfolk, Lincolnshire, and Cambridgeshire that QEH serves. This is not about having shiny new buildings for their own sake; it is about better health outcomes in some of the most deprived areas in the country that the Government have recognised as a priority for levelling up. By committing to this vitally needed hospital, the inevitable requirement for a replacement will become part of a funded programme rather than an unplanned demand on the Treasury requiring emergency funding. That is better value for taxpayers and will deliver the improvements that people in North West Norfolk and beyond deserve. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary has good news for my constituents soon, as they are rightly frustrated at the delay in this decision.

8.48 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It is an honour to speak in this very important debate.

Under this Government, living standards have plummeted to 1950s levels and life expectancy is falling. Office for National Statistics figures show that the inequality gap in the least deprived areas is growing even wider. Almost one in three children in Britain live in poverty. Britain is in decline under this Tory Government. Despite all this, the Government have the temerity to talk about levelling up. They can put this phrase at the front and centre of their rhetoric, but I saw nothing in the Queen's Speech that will actually deliver it. Nothing the Prime Minister has announced in his legislative agenda will address living standards or the cost of living crisis, help people to pay for childcare, or meet the unmet care needs of over 1 million older people. His announcements will not bridge the gap between what people earn and spiralling inflation, tax rises and fuel price surges. To achieve a stronger economy, make this country fairer, make our streets safer, fund the NHS properly and improve schools and higher education, we will need to reverse the failed policies of successive Tory Governments of the last 12 years.

As I listened to the Chancellor's spring statement in March, I thought of my constituent and his disabled partner, who is unable to work. He currently attends college to improve his skills, but earns well below the average wage. For them, living has meant relying on

candles for heating and lighting, and they are not alone. It is a cruel snapshot of today's Britain for many people—workers, pensioners and families with children—under the Tories.

I want Britain to be the best place to grow up in and to grow old in, but a baby growing up in Tory Britain today will have it harder than their grandparents. The Queen's Speech does not go far enough to address the long-term problems facing children and young people throughout the UK, such as the frightening numbers of children and young people waiting for mental health support. The levelling-up White Paper does not include clear measures to tackle child poverty or children's health inequalities. Where is the legislation to improve support for our most vulnerable children—those in care, care leavers and unpaid carers? Disabled young people cannot reach their full potential while they cannot access the health, care and other services they have a right to, such as respite care, therapies and specialist education.

The life-changing opportunity available a generation ago to go to university is being steadily eroded by the Government. The marketisation of higher education is a tragedy, and is hollowing out a sector that was once the envy of the world. Students who go to university are saddled with crippling debt. It is off-putting for so many who come from homes where household budgets are tight. Every child should have equal access to the education and training they desire, not have obstacles and the spectre of debt put in their way. They should not be persuaded that university is not for the likes of them.

Talking of children's futures, the Queen's Speech totally failed to deliver the urgent action required in response to the climate and nature emergencies. We desperately needed the Government to tackle the root cause of our energy and climate security problems and bring in legislation to speed up the transition from fossil fuels to renewables. Generations are being let down by a Government too short-sighted to plan for a more hopeful future, but who instead focus their attentions on themselves and how to keep the Prime Minister in office for another day. The Government have no new ideas and no real plan to fix their broken Britain or to build a better future for all, cradle to grave.

8.53 pm

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): The title for today's debate is "Making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old". With that in mind, I would like to be the first Member of this House to congratulate Jake Daniels on coming out today—the first active footballer in UK professional football to do so. It makes the UK an even better place to live and grow older. Many people like me, who grew up in a world where we looked for role models, will know that Jake can be very proud of the role that he will play as a role model for future generations.

In that vein, I welcome the Government's commitment in the Queen's Speech to ban conversion therapy, and I would gently push those on the Treasury Bench to remember that we included trans people in our original promise. We should include all LGBT people in that conversion therapy ban.

[Gary Sambrook]

Let me move on to education. I am pleased that 82% of young people in my constituency are now in schools that are good or outstanding. When I visit so many of my local schools—especially Balaam Wood; King Edward VI Northfield School for Girls, which used to be called Turves Green Girls' School; Turves Green Boys' School; Colmers Farm Primary School; and Hawkesley Church Primary Academy—I am always amazed by the dedication and commitment of so many of the teachers and by the young people, who have so much commitment to learning. I am also really pleased that the Edge Academy has been shortlisted for an award for its support for young people in that school right at the heart of Northfield.

Education concerns us all because it benefits young people and gives them the skills they need for the future. I am glad that there are measures in the Queen's Speech to improve higher education. Julia Stevens from Cadbury College is pleased with the new investment in the north block and new labs. She is committed to lifelong learning, as is Principal Mike Hopkins from South and City College, which is doing good work. I was pleased to open the electric car centre there only a couple of months ago. That college is committed to ensuring that young people have the skills of the future.

When it comes to people in the Northfield constituency growing older, we have two ExtraCare retirement villages—one in Bournville and one in Longbridge—which are an amazing example of what we can do when we are creative with housing and the many activities and things people can do in those retirement villages. They live together in communities that I like to refer to as being like static cruise ships. They are amazing places to visit—as soon as I hit the age of 55, I would love to put my name on the waiting list for an ExtraCare retirement village. As Members of Parliament, we should lead from the front, which is why the other week I was keen to join so many local people in the conga line when the oompah band played at the Bournville retirement village. Such villages really are places of the future into which we can encourage many people to move as they grow older.

On social housing, I was born on a council estate in Birmingham that was one of the largest council estates in Europe when it was built. My brilliant team that assists me in the constituency has now done more than 20,000 items of casework, many of which refer to housing and housing repairs. I am glad that the social housing regulation Bill will make sure that we increase the standard of the social housing that people live in and expand tenants' rights even further to people in the private rented sector.

We need to build more houses in the right places, in consultation with local people. When we have big projects in Birmingham, such as what was supposed to be the athletes village—unfortunately, it will not house any athletes during or after the Commonwealth games—it is unfortunate that we have a local authority that demands certain levels of social housing from private companies but falls really short of the expectation they encourage from people. At the last count, social housing made up only 4% of the thousands of houses being built under that scheme. We need to do more to make sure that the

22,000 people who are currently on the waiting list have the opportunity to get into social housing and on to the housing ladder.

I have only 10 seconds left. I would like to think that, in my near five hours of bobbing to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, I played some part in my ambition for the Government's obesity strategy.

8.58 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook), and it was interesting, too, because that Bournville retirement village would not have been possible had it not been for the endowment of the Bournville Village Trust, which was set up by my forebears before the welfare state and enabled the cost of the land and so on not to have to be covered. Most areas in this country do not have such an asset, which is why the Government need to support such provision.

If the Government really want to make Britain the best place to grow up in and provide the opportunities referred to by the Secretary of State for Education, they have to do far more than the thin gruel dished up in the Queen's Speech last week. I am not sure that many of my constituents who are at school, college or university see much to celebrate in the Queen's Speech. Schools in Labour-led Hounslow are all good or outstanding, but that is a challenge after a lost decade of underfunding. In our borough's schools alone, £17 million has been lost—or £500 per pupil. Parents and teachers are trying to fill the gap from their own pockets, but fewer can afford the money as the cost of living bites ever deeper. Now we read that there is a risk to life because of disrepair in too many school buildings, which cannot be fixed with income from school fetes. School buildings need a properly funded commitment from Government, like the Labour Government's Building Schools for the Future programme.

On covid catch-up funding, the Government have ignored the recommendations of Sir Kevan Collins, whom they appointed. He said that £15 billion was needed, but the Government agreed to spend only a fraction of that. Labour's children's recovery plan would fund significant and targeted extra investment for our young people who missed out most during the lockdowns.

Teachers' morale has to be addressed. Teaching is already challenging and over the past decade teachers have had to take on more responsibilities as staffing levels are cut to respond to the annual budget round and yet more central Government edicts. During the pandemic, teachers and school heads, who were at the frontline, told me that they felt let down and ignored by this Government, with announcements made on the spur of the moment and the Government lurching from one fiasco to another. At the same time, welfare, mental health and special needs support is still being cut, despite warm words from the Government. Teachers and school staff were on the frontline during the pandemic but have been left behind by this Government, so it is no surprise that seven out of 10 teachers have considered leaving the profession in the last year. The Government need to wake up to the huge amount of anger and distrust that they have created among school staff. Investing in school staff and school buildings means investing in children's learning and development, and in

their future. Labour has a funded plan to invest in school staff, to enable all teachers and leadership teams to continue to access continuing professional development.

Students have been all but ignored by this Government. Practically the only time we hear Ministers talking about universities or students is when they want to create a distraction or a row. Perhaps if the Government talked to students and higher education staff, and actually listened, they would know that students are already struggling with the cost of living, with rising rents, energy bills and food costs. Many students in my constituency tell me that they have to work full time to fund themselves through university, supposedly on full-time courses. I have heard from 16 and 17-year-olds who are terrified that they will not be able to go to university because of the costs. So much for social mobility.

In conclusion, this Queen's Speech is the proof that, after 12 years in power, the Government have no ambition or determination to fix the problems in the education system that they have created. On school funding, we hear "Computer says no" from the Chancellor. There is no plan to support school staff and leadership teams with adequate pay or proper mental health support, and certainly little sign of a coherent and evidenced schools policy. There is no plan to support students, just a carefully hidden rise in student loan interest payments in the last Budget and, as I said earlier, nothing for Muslim students who are unable to take out student loans.

Labour would take a different path—a better path. Families in my constituency would have a Government who were on their side, with a plan to tackle the cost of living crisis with a windfall tax on oil and gas producers; a Government with an ambitious catch-up plan for education, as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson). That is how we will make Britain the best place to grow up.

9.3 pm

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), my co-chair on the all-party parliamentary group for cycling and walking, where we so often agree—tonight we probably will not.

We are looking to make Britain the best place to grow up and grow old. I am delighted to represent the beautiful constituency of North Devon, which is certainly one of the most popular places to grow up and grow old, having had a surge of people move there during the pandemic, for their primary residence and for second homes. We are also an incredibly popular holiday destination, which has led to a surge in Airbnb short-term holiday lets. Although that is great for our tourism economy, it does mean that we have something of a housing crisis. Although I warmly welcome the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, I very much hope that, as it makes its passage through the House, we will see more done to tackle second homes and short-term holiday lets, to rebalance our housing economy in North Devon. While I have the opportunity to put this on record, I also hope that the long-awaited consultation on short-term holiday lets promised last June as part of the tourism recovery strategy will be forthcoming as the first step on the journey to sorting out our housing market.

I am a former maths teacher and I have spent time in this place before talking about averages and variations. When it comes to education and the Schools Bill, I very much hope that we will look deeper than the average that says that Devon is okay, because when we look at the variants in a county the size of Devon, we can see that there are some issues in my constituency. If we were to look at the social mobility index, we would see that South Hams is 49th out of 324, Exeter is 81st, my North Devon constituency is 238th and my neighbouring area of Torrington—northern Devon, as we call it up there—is 283rd. We need to look deeper than at just the large local authority if we are to enable those children to have their education levelled up, because to date we have missed out on cold-spot funding.

I am delighted to welcome Multiply, but I do not know quite how it will be delivered in my constituency, where we have only one further education college and are 65 miles from the nearest university. My FE college, Petroc College, is utterly brilliant but please don't tell me that Multiply will come in as an online course, because what we do not have in North Devon is broadband. The Queen's Speech talks about the elimination of the barrier of digital exclusion, but when I talk about digital exclusion, it is not so much about the gadgets that the children have; it is that we cannot even connect to the outside world.

The inequalities that I talk about as regards levelling up are about rural and coastal communities. My theme throughout my few minutes' speech tonight is how we can ensure that, as we level up the country, we reach into those pockets of deprivation in rural and coastal Britain. Health inequalities on the coast are perhaps better documented than educational ones, but I would like to sing the praises of my tiny North Devon District Hospital, the smallest on the mainland. It has done a fantastic job for the people of North Devon through the pandemic. We have also recently seen it merge with the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust, which means that we are managing the flow of patients and medical professionals between that tiny hospital and the bigger one further south.

In Devon, we have retained our Nightingale hospital, and I am terribly proud that we will be the first to deliver our covid catch-up fund wards. On 23 May, the £1.9 million given to my hospital in December will mean that we can start to deliver operations and orthopaedic procedures such as knee and hip replacements. That is a remarkable achievement and the team is also ready to build our new hospital. We are one of the 40, and the plans are modular. While I have the attention of the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), tonight, I want to ask whether there is any chance of bringing that forward. We are in the final phase, and we could build it now. Without those new theatres and the new housing element of the hospital, we are struggling to bring people to North Devon because of the housing crisis I described earlier.

I would not say that everything health-wise was rosy. It will come as no surprise to the Minister to hear that we are a little short of dentists. If any of them are listening tonight, let me tell them that the surf is fantastic, the countryside is beautiful and they will get the warmest of welcomes. I hear that the Indians have a lot of dentists looking for work, and we would welcome them

[Selaine Saxby]

with open arms. Also, this is a Department that has managed to deliver things in buses, so please may we have a mobile dental unit to visit our children in the coming weeks and months? As we look at how we can level up rural and coastal Britain, I hope that we can morality-check our policies, because many of them that work so well in Westminster have lost that certain *je ne sais quoi* by the time they reach us in rural and coastal North Devon.

9.8 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is right that when the Government bring forward their programme, the Opposition criticise it, but it is slightly surprising that the Government make it so easy for us. When the world is quite obviously struggling, and the country is struggling with rising prices and a climate emergency, there are obvious measures that any Government could be taking, whether that means introducing a windfall tax or insulating our homes. The question I find myself asking is: why on earth are the Government not doing any of those things?

We have a ragbag of Bills before us, and I will comment on a few of them. One that has been mentioned is the data reform Bill. I was on the Committee for the Bill that introduced GDPR—the general data protection regulation—a couple of years ago, and at that time we on this side of the House made it clear that the Government needed to be much more ambitious and forward-looking. I would caution, though, that if we go in a different way from many of our neighbours, we should think hard about what that will mean for our businesses and research institutions. It is a coded message, but we should beware of what that might bring if we do not do it in the right way.

On education, the one thing that seems to link most of the Bills is the fact they rather miss the point. What I hear from my schools is that there is a real problem with the very young children coming in following the pandemic. They need the extra help and catch-up that other colleagues mentioned.

I cannot help but notice the references to families of schools. We used to have a family of schools within each local authority, but now, of course, we have predatory multi-academy trusts circling our schools and looking to take them over, which is no way to get the kind of co-operation we need.

Similarly, the higher education Bill's lifelong loan entitlement is largely welcome, but there is very little detail at the moment. Many worry about how that will be introduced and what they will be asked to do. The issues for universities are much more pressing than some of the Government's proposals, particularly the future of our collaborative funding with other parts of the world and the Horizon Europe programme. We need certainty on that, as a huge amount hangs on it. As I am sure the Secretary of State knows, it is linked to other things, but those are the issues that really worry universities.

For young people in my city of Cambridge, it is about housing. The Secretary of State effectively gave up on the housing targets last week, which does not exactly engender confidence in where the Government are going. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West

Norwood (Helen Hayes) spoke passionately about the issues facing renters, and there is a huge set of issues in my city. Yes, the long-promised removal of section 21 is welcome, but we need much more.

What a state this country is in for people who are getting old. My hon. Friends the Members for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) spoke about dentistry, and I never imagined we would reach a state where people in acute pain can no longer get help—that is happening all over the country, and in my city, too.

On ambulance waits, again, we have reached a situation where people are paying for the national health service but can no longer rely on it. Over the weekend, I spoke to a paramedic who works for the East of England Ambulance Service. These people are working flat out, but she is haunted that she went to serve and help an elderly person who had been waiting 18 hours, and who died as a consequence—that is happening in this country now. Lives are being lost. Where is the urgency? The Secretary of State led on the virus, and we should have the same urgency in tackling the waiting-time crisis that is affecting everyone.

There are things that were not in the Queen's Speech but, for an area like mine, should have been. We need to get the infrastructure right. For cities such as Cambridge to prosper and drive the UK economy, we have to get housing and transport right, which means we must stop prevaricating about East West Rail and finish it off directly to Cambridge.

Finally, we must stop laying into universities, which are one of our great success stories. The research excellence framework results over the past few days prove that point. This is something we are really good at. We do not need to pick fights with one another, having pointless arguments and stoking up culture wars; we should concentrate on what we are good at and start celebrating universities. Conservative Members should look at the weekend's press reports, which are right that graduates are voting a certain way. Frankly, we are the future.

9.13 pm

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): The title of this debate is, "Making Britain the Best Place to Grow Up and Grow Old," but it needs to be seen against the backdrop of our recent covid pandemic and the recovery. Throughout the pandemic, parallels were rightly drawn with surviving a war. Indeed, it was often called the battle against covid, whether in the coming together of our nation at the beginning of the pandemic, in the demonstration of national unity as we appreciated the key workers who delivered all the services we needed, in the unprecedented roll-out by volunteers of health programmes to protect the vulnerable or in the eye-watering expenditure. Every year, in November, we have a day to remember those who gave their life in war, and we rightly know that is a debt we can never repay, but I am conscious that there are millions of people in our society today to whom we owe a debt, as a result of the lockdowns and the privations of covid, that must be repaid—they are our children and young people.

We knew all along that those millions of children and young people were at the very least risk from the virus, yet we still as a House consciously chose to lock them

away for the safety of others, and they have suffered. I have heard from young adults who never got the chance to do the things that are seen as a rite of passage for young people and define points in their lives. Many have never experienced the pressure of having to take exams, and they are not sure if they have the resilience to be able to cope with it. Others worry that their teacher-assessed grades may be seen as devalued qualifications. They did not get to go to their prom, did not get to go to their end-of-year assembly and did not get to say goodbye to their friends. All these things, both small and large, help prepare them for the challenges of adulthood. Despite the fact that, as a whole, they were at incredibly low risk from the virus, I do fear for their mental health and I fear for their resilience—and we owe them.

I have heard from secondary schools in my constituency that children moving up to them are far behind where the professionals would expect them to be both academically and socially. Giving children laptops to work from home during lockdowns was all well and good, but the work was not always appropriate and there was not always the correct parental support; some parents just did not have the skills or the time to support their children as we would have liked them to. Once again, those children were at little risk, and they have had precious years of their education taken away from them to protect others—and we owe them.

There are infants starting out on their educational journey far behind normal development targets. Local nurseries tell me that children cannot toilet themselves, and that they lack social skills and confidence. They have the longest time to catch up, but catch up they must or they will bear the scars of the covid pandemic longer than any of us. Primary schools are also noting deficits in social skills in all years, but significantly in year 2. Those children, due to covid, lost the foundation years that are so crucial for their development, and for those who did not receive sufficient parental support, the damage is even harder.

The Government must legislate to ensure every opportunity is made available for our children and young people to catch up. Over time, the price they will be paying will be higher than any of us will pay. There was a minimal risk to them, but they have lost huge opportunities. In a civilised society, I expect adults to make sacrifices for our children and young people; I do not expect our children and young people to make sacrifices for us. We owe a debt to them, and it must be repaid. All Government legislation must take into account the damage we have done, through pandemic recovery, to our children and young people, because our children and young people are the future of our country, and they need to be protected.

9.17 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): For too long, social care has been neglected. The pressures and strains on the NHS and social care are ever growing, with half a million people waiting for care assessments. People are living longer and with more complex needs, yet the funding for social care has not kept pace. The Queen's Speech offers nothing to fix social care.

Most ageing people who require care do not want to move into a care home or be taken into hospital, which very often happens because they have not had care

at home. Most of the time they do not need to go into hospital, as most of the care can be given at home, including some health services. Elderly people would much rather be in their homes, close to their families and friends. For this to happen there needs to be adequate social care and health funding.

People should be able to age with dignity in the place they want to be—this is about the quality of life that people deserve as they grow older—and that can happen if the Government invest resources to meet the needs in the social care sector. This would prevent most people being hospitalised and save many beds in the national health service. There are currently 6 million people waiting for NHS treatment. One of the best ways to free up more resources in hospitals and GP surgeries is by having adequate social care for the elderly, which would mean doctors not necessarily having to go out and save hospital beds.

St Helens' adult social care and clinical commissioning group have integrated and developed systems that include police, housing and probation services. They all help to provide care and keep people where they want to be, and prevent them needing healthcare. That frees up beds in hospitals for other services—it can be done. Where health treatments can be given at home, elderly people should be able to stay in their own homes.

The national insurance levy will not resolve this issue. If social care was respected and funded correctly, I say again that it would free up hospital beds and NHS capacity. Funding the NHS without adequately funding social care will not fix the problem. We cannot have a fully functioning health service without a fully functioning social care system. Local authorities have had their budgets cut consistently for over a decade. Even with the additional social care levy, they do not scratch the surface of the needs of the problem of social care. According to the Local Government Association, over 57% of council tax funding already goes on social care, which is already the top priority for local authorities, yet there is only so much they can do without the Government giving the support that is needed.

Social care is a statutory duty for councils. It is a moral duty for society. Most importantly, it is the responsibility of Government to look after the public. A social care system that is adequately funded frees up GPs and other NHS resources. Social care has been the elephant in the room for decades. It needs sorting out and sorting out properly, and not from a heavy hand down—it needs developing upwards. The country cannot afford for the Government to continue kicking the can down the road. I urge the Government to face up to their responsibilities, to fund and respect social care, and to respect our elderly and disabled people.

9.21 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): In thinking about how to make the UK the best place to grow up and grow old, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for disability I have been thinking in particular about inclusive growth and levelling up for people with disabilities. I saw a fantastic example of that at the weekend in my constituency, where sportscotland had partnered with South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture to train local organisations who work in sports to make sure they are engaging with

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

people with disabilities, encouraging them to engage and reach their full potential through the group activities and sports activities that are available. Only when growth and the work we do is inclusive to all can we make sure that we leave no one behind and ensure that we are doing our job here.

I want to ask MPs: can we do more? What are we doing in Parliament? When the all-party parliamentary group looked at including people with disabilities on work experience in our offices, we started off at 11% of MPs who were registered as accredited Disability Confident employers. Through a workshop, the all-party parliamentary group has increased that to 24% and I thank everybody who has been involved in that achievement. It has been so fantastic to hear the accounts of people who have engaged in work experience and employment opportunities in MPs' offices, and how they have fundamentally changed their lives and the opportunities available to them. We want to do more and reach at least up to 50% this year. There will be further workshops, so please look out for them. This is not just about the Queen's Speech and what the Government can do; it is what we can do individually as MPs to contribute more to make the UK a much more inclusive place and ensure that we are always giving opportunities to everybody that we can.

I also want to focus on wellbeing and equality, and a wellbeing economy. Countries are starting to look at happiness and at what makes us happy. Wellbeing, happiness and quality of life are becoming high priorities for many Governments, and I believe they should be a high priority for this Government. There is a Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen which is conducting research on that. I have been looking at the research and thinking why are we not happier? We are lagging behind the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and a number of countries where people are much happier in themselves and have greater levels of wellbeing. We should think about what makes people happy and what creates wellbeing; it would be lovely to see a happy Minister, or perhaps a Minister for happiness and wellbeing. Perhaps we could invite the researchers from the Happiness Research Institute to speak to us about wellbeing and how we can promote it across the United Kingdom. We know from its research that economic or financial hardship predicts unhappiness so part of this is about equality, but it is also about physical inactivity, because that lowers quality of life and life expectancy. Access to green spaces and to play parks and being able to engage in the outdoors is important; we all felt the impact of that during covid, but the research suggests we should pay even more attention to these issues.

Mental health and depression are the antithesis of happiness. They cause a real threat to wellbeing, impacting on the wellbeing not only of the individual but of their whole family and their family life, so we need much more focus on mental health services. Low wellbeing in later life creates costs in health and social care, so we need a holistic approach.

It was interesting to note that homes are a big factor in overall happiness—our security in our homes, being able to live in a safe home, free from threat, risk and antisocial behaviour. So local authorities have a huge role to play in this, too.

Christian Matheson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Cameron: I am sorry, but I only have a minute left.

It is extremely important to make social supports and communities more available to people. So I want the Government to also have a look at wellbeing and happiness because, with a holistic approach, good lives make for happiness and wellbeing and that is also good economics.

9.26 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): This has been an excellent and wide-ranging debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), and I say to my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) that it was well worth the wait to hear her speech on the importance of rebalancing health and social care to help us tackle the pressures on the NHS.

We have heard some fantastic speeches, disproportionately from the Opposition side of the House, I might say. My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) highlighted the increasingly poor outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, and in particular the terrible injustice of the growing inequality between those who can pay for a diagnosis and those who cannot. My hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) and for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) made wide-ranging, powerful speeches on this Government's failure on education catch-up, school buildings, Sure Start and so many of the pillars of educational success built by the last Labour Government and now sadly eroded under the last 12 years of Conservative Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) highlighted the link between mental health and educational outcome and the importance of prioritising mental health for children and young people.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) all got their teeth into the crisis in dentistry; not for the first time, my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South has sounded the alarm, but maybe the Secretary of State will listen to those alarms this time—if not to my bad puns.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) gave a tub-thumping speech rightly asking where the employment Bill is and the promised employment rights that have failed to materialise. He also made a powerful argument for a full ban on conversion therapy. If this is to be the best place in the world for children to grow up, it is absolutely right that we ban that abhorrent practice; it is not therapy in the slightest. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Members for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook), who highlighted the importance of this being an LGBT conversion therapy ban, and applaud them for making that case from the Government Benches. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield rightly said in what was a very entertaining speech, today this country has already become that little bit better as a place to grow up, thanks to the courage of Jake Daniels in becoming the first male footballer to come out since 1990. It really should not take courage in this day and age for a footballer to say that they are gay; in fact, it really should not be relevant

at all, but sadly we know that it is. He has made himself a powerful role model and, I hope, an example that others will follow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge highlighted the crisis in the NHS and the life-and-death consequences of ambulance waits. He asked “Where is the urgency?”—a very fair question that I hope the Secretary of State will answer. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) spoke powerfully about the experience of young people in the criminal justice system.

Then there were speeches about levelling up. My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) highlighted the gap between rhetoric and reality. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) well summarised the Government’s approach to levelling up in their planning reform: the Victor Meldrew approach, as she called it, levelling down next door’s conservatory—hardly the level of ambition that this country needs. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) highlighted how levelling up is a slogan without substance. There was a pretty interesting—depending on your perspective—effort from the hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans), who offered a new slogan for the Government’s planning policies: “INBED with Gove”, a mental image that none of us wanted but that we have been left with none the less at this late hour.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) gave a searing account of poverty in his community. He is right: this is a matter of political choices. We heard about the consequences of those choices in the speeches of other hon. Friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) highlighted the disaster of children growing up in overcrowded temporary accommodation, with huge consequences for their learning and their life chances. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) spoke about having to run summer holiday lunch clubs and Christmas hamper schemes because of the grotesque level of poverty in her constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) described the embarrassment and humiliation of parents who are unable to provide for their children. Children share their parents’ anxiety about how to make ends meet, so they do not even tell them when they are required to bring in some extra kit for school, such as for cooking classes, or when there is an extra ask for school trips. That is a thoroughly damning indictment of this Government.

If I may say so, as the son of a single mum, I was really moved by how my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) described her experience. If only it were as simple as Ministers claimed on the morning round today—if only people could just put in a few extra hours or take on a better-paid job—but it is just not as simple as going out and finding more hours. Many of our constituents are already working three jobs. How many more jobs and how many more hours do the Government want them to take on?

I hope that hon. Members will forgive me, but the very best speech today was the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton). We dearly, dearly miss her predecessor, our dear friend Jack Dromey, but I know that he would have been proud to see her make that speech today, as we all were.

This is a great country with a world of opportunity. I am glad that I was born in Britain, but this is also a country that is being held back by intolerable levels of inequality and by a Government who are simply unable to face up to the scale of the challenge. Half a million more children are set to be plunged into poverty, following the Chancellor’s spring statement. Two million adults are going full days without meals. Many more are relying on food banks to feed themselves and their family, as I found when I went around the country in the local election campaign. In Colchester, the food bank told me that NHS nurses were coming in and accessing it. Pensioner poverty is again on the rise, with out-of-control bills, a real-terms cut to the state pension and national insurance rises meaning that working pensioners will be more than £1,200 worse off over the next two years.

This cost of living crisis is not just a Treasury issue, but a health issue. If millions of people in this country face a choice whether to heat their homes or to eat regular meals, they will get sick or will fail to recover from sickness. Before we entered the pandemic, average life expectancy—surely the most basic measure of the progress of a country or a society—had stalled for the first time in decades. It is a mark of shame that, in 2022, in the sixth richest nation on earth, 5,000 people were admitted to hospital for malnutrition in the last six months. Cases of scurvy have doubled since 2010—scurvy! Twelve years of Conservative Government is ushering in the return of Dickensian diseases to Britain. What kind of country have we become when millions of people who work full time still cannot afford the basics?

The British people deserve a Government on their side. Instead, we have the only Government in the G7 who think that now is a good time to raise taxes on working people. We have a Government who are happy to add to working people’s tax burden but, as we know from members of the Cabinet, spend plenty of time avoiding paying their own. The Government promised 38 new pieces of legislation, but not a single one will put more money into people’s pockets. All the Government have to offer families struggling today are sneering lectures telling them to work harder, find a second or third job or book themselves in for a cookery class.

We have seen this Government’s approach when challenged on the cost of living. Blame the people. Blame the Bank of England. Blame anyone but themselves. Even when challenged about his own spring statement that plunges half a million more people into poverty, what was the Chancellor’s excuse? The computer said no. That did not stop him taking 20 quid a week off the poorest people in our country, did it? It worked then. Surely it works now.

Britain deserves better. We need a Government who understand what life is like for most people in this country. If we had such a Government, we would not have the Education Secretary talking about tipping the balance in favour of private schools. Who is he trying to kid? He is defending the 7% of people who go to private schools, who are going to have a brilliant world of opportunities available to them, but failing to stand up for the 93% who do not. Let me tell him about tipping the balance, as someone who received free school meals, went through the state education system and made it to Cambridge University. I was one of just 1% of kids on free school meals to make it to Cambridge University,

[*Wes Streeting*]

and I am proud that I got there, but do not tell kids from state schools who are making it now, and who are finally being judged on their merits, that the system has been tilted in their favour. Those kids know full well from their life experience, from their childhood and from growing up under a Conservative Government that the party and his colleagues have done everything they can to tilt the balance in favour of people like him, from backgrounds like their own, at the expense of people from backgrounds like mine. That is the truth.

What the Education Secretary does not understand is that it is not talent or potential that is unevenly distributed in this country; it is opportunity. Participation in extracurricular activities is falling in state schools. Fewer children are doing sports, drama and music, and the least well-off children are three times more likely to do no extracurricular activities at all. The Conservative Government may accept this poverty of ambition for our children, but the Labour party will not. Just as we rebuilt the education system under the last Labour Government, so we will have the same level of ambition for the next one. I am very sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East, but we will be putting her lunch clubs out of business, because the next Labour Government will work to end child poverty, not to increase it.

I turn to health. There was just one mention of health in the Queen's Speech: the long-awaited overhaul of the Mental Health Act. The proposed changes are welcome, but this legislation alone will not solve the challenges facing people who live with severe mental illness, reverse this Government's persistent neglect of mental health services or narrow the gaping mental health inequalities that mean that black people are over four times more likely to be detained under the existing Act.

Our mental health services simply do not meet the scale of the challenge. A quarter of beds for patients struggling with poor mental health have been cut over the last 12 years. One in every three children who seeks support from mental health services is turned away at the door, and 1.6 million people in total are waiting for treatment. They are waiting too long, and those who are offered treatment are often sent to the other end of the country because there are no local beds and services available.

People struggling with poor mental health will not get the support they need if we do not have enough frontline staff. That is why Labour's plan would guarantee mental health treatment within a month to all who need it. That would be done by investing in an additional 8,500 staff and offering specialist mental health support in every school. Because politics is about choices, let me be clear about the choices we would make. We would pay for that mental health support for every child in the country by removing the VAT exemption from private schools and closing tax loopholes for private equity fund managers. I know that the Education Secretary is pitching himself as a defender of private school privilege ahead of the next Conservative leadership election and the Health Secretary may well have benefited from these tax loopholes himself. Let me tell Members on the Conservative Benches—there will be a Conservative leadership election a lot sooner than there will be a Labour leadership election.

I hope we can agree that mental health is one of the most urgent needs of our time, particularly after the pandemic, which was difficult for so many. I am glad that the Health Secretary is here to respond, because I would like him to account for his Government's record. Patients are being made to wait longer than ever before as we sleepwalk towards a two-tier system that betrays the founding principles of our NHS. The self-pay healthcare market in the UK has doubled since 2010. People have been forced to go private because they will not get the treatment that they need. Billions more have been spent on private insurance and operations. Private healthcare providers are rubbing their hands together because they know that people are increasingly choosing to jump the queue while the rest are left to wait for up to two years for care.

The Health Secretary will tell us, of course—let me save him some time—that our NHS is suffering from a covid backlog and that the problems facing the health service are all the result of the pandemic. There is a backlog in the NHS, but it is a Conservative backlog. The NHS was experiencing record waiting lists going into the pandemic. It was 100,000 staff short, with another 112,000 vacancies in social care. Suspected cancer patients have been waiting longer to be seen every single year since Labour left office. Not only was there just one piece of legislation across health and social care, but, as I mentioned, the Government have dropped their long-promised employment Bill. What does the Secretary of State say to the millions of family carers in this country who were promised a week's carer's leave—just one week a year to have a break—but who have been let down and left waiting again and again by this Government?

The fact is that the longer we give the Conservatives in office, the longer patients will wait: longer for a GP appointment, longer for an ambulance to arrive—now two hours for thousands of heart attack and stroke victims—longer for an operation, with some patients waiting since before the pandemic began, and longer for pensioners and the disabled to wait for suitable social care. We are paying more. We are waiting longer. That is the Conservative record, and the longer we give the Conservatives in office, the longer Britain waits. Well, their time is up.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before I call the Secretary of State, I emphasise how important it is that Members get back in good time for the wind-ups. It is extremely discourteous to the Front Benches and others who have participated in the debate if people are late and, in some cases, not here at all. It has been noted.

9.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid): It is an honour to close this debate on the Loyal Address. In this platinum jubilee year, let me extend my thanks to Her Majesty the Queen for her years of dedicated service.

I also thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part, but, I have to say, I am disappointed in the shadow Health Secretary, the hon. Member for Ilford North (*Wes Streeting*). He has taken this once again as an opportunity to talk down Britain, as he so often does, and has chosen to use this debate as a naked

leadership pitch for his own party. He talked about leadership bids in his speech because he has no ideas at all about how to improve the society for British people. He knows that both of us had to fight to get our foot in the door. He knows that our chances to succeed come from this country's world-class public services, yet he stands there and has the audacity to attack my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, who came to this country as an 11-year-old immigrant and rose to the position that he has today—by the way, he could rise to that position only in the Conservative party.

I speak with feeling about this country. For my family, coming to Britain was a choice, too. They came here for freedom, security, opportunity and prosperity. They came here because they believed that Britain was the best place in the world in which to grow up and grow old. They were right then and they are right today. Public services have been a lifeline for me and my family—the teachers who made my career possible, the police officers who kept me and my family safe, and the NHS that cared for my father in his dying days. This Queen's Speech backs our public services. It invests in them and it reforms them to secure the future of Britain. Unlike the shadow Secretary of State, I have always been an optimist about Britain's future.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Twenty-hour ambulance waiting time—is that world beating?

Sajid Javid: Of course it is not. I will come on to that in a moment. The hon. Lady knows full well why the NHS is facing its most challenging time in history.

Being the best place in which to grow up and grow old relies on keeping people safe, including from disease. We rose to the challenges of the pandemic. Brexit gave us the mindset to license and deploy a vaccine against covid-19 quicker than any other country. The phenomenal NHS got jabs into every part of the UK, and it is the wisdom of the British people that has meant that we have one of the highest vaccination rates anywhere in the world. We created a juggernaut of a testing and surveillance system. We bought more antivirals per head than any other country in Europe, and we got it right on omicron, with the most successful booster programme in Europe. As a result of all that, we were the first country in Europe to remove all restrictions. Had we listened to the Labour party, we would have been shackled to the EU on vaccines, and our schools would have been shuttered for even longer, contrary to what the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) said. Instead, because this Government got the big calls right, we are leading the world when it comes to living with covid.

From clinics to classrooms, the pandemic showed the wealth of our skills. The skills mission is a job for the whole of Government. In his opening speech, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education outlined our ambitions for the new Schools Bill to deliver a stronger schools system that works for every child, as talked about today by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) when he spoke about academy trusts, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Cherilyn Mackrory) when she talked about the importance of early years.

We are also delivering a Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, which will reverse the chilling effect of no platforming in our world-class institutions, while our higher education reform Bill promises to bring about a fairer and more sustainable future. I listened carefully when my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) talked passionately about putting our children and our young people first.

A skills-rich economy is about more than just the elite institutions. I am the product of Filton Technical College. It ignited my desire to go to university and helped me get to where I am today. This is a Government who treat further education colleges with the seriousness that they deserve. When I was Chancellor I was proud to put an additional £400 million into further education in this country. This is a great country in which to grow up and grow old, and a great country in which to stay skilled, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett) said earlier in the debate.

On healthcare, this Government passionately believe in the NHS and its founding principles, in a world-class healthcare system that is free at the point of access for everyone. Funding from the levy, which the Labour party voted against, on top of the historic long-term NHS settlement that was announced in 2018, means that the NHS resource budget in England will increase to £162.6 billion by 2024-25. That is the highest budget that the NHS has ever had, and it includes an additional £8 billion over the next three years to tackle those covid backlogs. In a fast-changing world, with an ageing population, we need to embrace new ways of thinking. A number of my hon. Friends referred to the investment that we are making, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans). I also listened carefully, when my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) was talking about NHS investment. He made a very powerful case for it.

We have set out our plans to tackle the covid-19 backlogs, we have legislated for a new Health and Care Act, and we have published an integration White Paper. We have an upcoming digital and data strategy, and we are setting out a new 10-year cancer plan. I cannot see him in the Chamber now, but the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) talked about the importance of cancer care. We are also setting out a new 10-year plan to improve mental health.

A number of Members rightly spoke of the importance of mental health, including my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler), who speaks with passion on this subject, especially when it comes to the mental health of children. We will soon publish a health disparities White Paper, which I hope will be welcomed by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), who rightly spoke of the importance of levelling up, and we will also soon publish the outcome of the Messenger review of health and social care leadership. We are bringing the Mental Health Act 1983 into the 21st century—the Queen's Speech referred to draft legislation for that purpose—ensuring that those experiencing a mental health crisis are treated as people, not patients.

As I have said, a number of Members spoke passionately about mental health—notably the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton), whom I welcome to her place in the Chamber. I agreed with one thing

[Sajid Javid]

that the hon. Member for Ilford North said earlier: all Members, on both sides of the House, miss her predecessor, Jack Dromey, very much, but I know that had he listened to the hon. Lady's speech he would have been very proud of what she said. She spoke with passion and pride about her community, and I know that she served for many years—for over two decades—in the NHS. When she speaks about mental health, she speaks with experience, and I know that she will have much of value to say in the House in the years ahead.

Many other colleagues made important contributions about the NHS. My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) talked about the investment in community diagnostic centres. The hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) talked about the importance of dentistry and the need to maintain investment.

At the heart of our strategy for the NHS are prevention, personalisation, performance and people. Prevention means focusing much more on the biggest killers: tobacco, obesity and alcohol. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) spoke of the importance of continuing to tackle obesity. Personalisation means making use, where we can, of community services, something that I know my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) would welcome; and when it comes to people, there are more doctors and nurses working in the NHS today than ever before. We are on track to deliver 50,000 more nurses by the end of this Parliament, and we have a record number of medical students in England. The fact is that the Opposition have no plans for the NHS. They voted against our plan to secure resources for the NHS, and they have no idea how to meet the challenges of the future.

We are also transforming the provision of adult social care. We are investing an additional £5.4 billion over the next three years; we are introducing a more generous means-testing system by more than quadrupling the upper savings threshold to £100,000; we are protecting more people from the lottery of catastrophic care costs; and we are putting half a billion pounds behind our

social care workforce. I hope the hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) will welcome that. She talked about adult social care, and I hope that she and others will recognise that this is record investment. These changes matter, because whether we are growing old or a working-age adult, social care is there for all of us. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Robert Lorgan) talked about that as well.

Cat Smith: May I ask the Health Secretary what he plans to do for the victims of sodium valproate, who live with lifelong care needs?

Sajid Javid: The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), met some of the victims of that today. There are plans that we are closely looking at and when we are ready we will come to this House with them.

My hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Jacob Young) and for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) praised the energy security Bill, and they were right to do so—it is a very important piece of legislation that this country has long needed. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison) rightly welcomed the investment in increased police numbers. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) said about the importance of happiness. I agree, but I assure her that the Government Benches are full of happy Ministers, so I do not think we need any more.

Her Majesty's most noble speech sets out a positive vision of freedom, security, opportunity and prosperity. It matches the ideals that brought my family to this country: that this is, and will continue to be, the best country in the world to grow up and grow old in. Unlike Labour, we are optimists about Britain's future. The choice for the country is clear: between a Government with an ambitious vision for the country and an Opposition without a plan. We will provide the leadership that this country needs. I commend this Queen's Speech to the House.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Scott Mann.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

City of Culture 2025: Wrexham's Bid

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Scott Mann.)

9.56 pm

Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con): It is an honour to have been granted this Adjournment debate on Wrexham's bid for city of culture 2025.

We are thrilled to be in the final four, with the title within touching distance. Bradford, Southampton and County Durham have made good bids, and colleagues from across the House have put forward very convincing arguments for them. However, one key difference sets the Wrexham apart from the other three, and that is Wales. If Wrexham were to become city of culture 2025, it would be the first Welsh winner of the title since the inception of the competition. As a proud Unionist, as I know a few of us Conservative Members are, I believe that a Welsh winner would highlight the commitment of this Government to the Union. Talking of firsts, Wrexham has had a few. I am the first Conservative female MP to be elected in Wales, and 2019 was the first ever time that Wrexham turned blue. We are going for a hat-trick in hoping that Wrexham is named the first city of culture in Wales.

One huge element of this bid is that we have the Welsh language as our trump card. Since many responsibilities in Wales are devolved to the Welsh Labour Government in Cardiff, the city of culture bid presents a unique opportunity for the whole of the UK to celebrate the individualism of Wales, and its proud language and culture, while also celebrating its importance as part of our Union. Wrexham has a diverse population with over 70 languages spoken, the largest being our Polish community, who recently mobilised to send aid to Ukraine, working with local businesses to facilitate nearly £2 million-worth of donations. Working with each other for the betterment of Wrexham is what we do. Wrexham's city of culture bid has involved over 200 stakeholders, with 50 grants being awarded to community organisations to participate, and we have held over 90 city of culture events already.

Wrexham is a town built on brewing, football and mining. To take football, which is very topical at the moment, Wrexham association football club is on a high. On Sunday, I will be cheering on the reds at the FA trophy final against Bromley at Wembley—and of course we will win. Someone would have had to have had their eye off the ball to have missed the fact that Wrexham AFC is now owned by Hollywood actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney. Wrexham has certainly been put on the map. We are not new best friends just yet, but I am working on it, and Rob and Ryan know the importance—

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Scott Mann.)

Sarah Atherton: Rob and Ryan know the importance of football to Wrexham, and want to nurture and champion it. As the Minister knows from a visit a while back, the home of Wrexham AFC is the historic Racecourse Ground, which is in some ways the headquarters of

our town. The Racecourse Ground is the oldest international football ground in the world and has been used to host international matches. When Wales hosted the rugby world cup in 1999, the Wrexham Racecourse was filled with more than 16,000 fans from around the world. International games have not been seen on that scale since, mainly because the capacity no longer allows it.

Like everyone in Wrexham and the whole of north Wales, I am passionate about returning international sporting events to north Wales. The redevelopment of the historic Kop stand, which I am campaigning for as part of Wrexham's levelling-up fund bid, will allow for an extra 5,500 spectators, which will then permit the hosting of international sporting events. If you would like to sign our petition, Madam Deputy Speaker, please click on to change.org and "Redevelop the Racecourse to create a Stadium for the North", where all signatures are welcomed. Our aim is to make Wrexham the home of Welsh football. Hollywood investment, the arrival of the national football museum for Wales, commitment by the Football Association of Wales and the redevelopment of the Kop stand—fingers crossed—could all make that a reality.

Another founding pillar of Wrexham is brewing. Wrexham Lager was founded in 1881, is the staple of the town and is steeped in fascinating history. As a former brewer myself, Wrexham Lager is close to not only my heart, but my tastebuds. The brewery exemplifies Wrexham's business and trading prowess. The lager was one of the first international exports from Wrexham, imported to the Americas in the 1800s. It was served as the only beer on the Titanic—it went down well—and it is a firm favourite of the British Navy.

That brings me nicely onto the significance of Wrexham's military heritage. It is a military town with a proud veteran community—I am one. Hightown barracks was the home of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, dating back to 1689. Hightown barracks was only to billet a residual military presence until last year, when the Ministry of Defence recognised Wrexham's military significance and returned a reserve unit of the Royal Welsh back to the barracks under the future soldier programme. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for Defence for affirming his commitment to Wrexham and north Wales.

On the final pillar of Wrexham, as I see it, I must mention the importance of mining to the town. Wrexham was a proud mining town, which was rocked in 1934 by the Gresford mining disaster, where 266 men lost their lives. We are fiercely proud of our mining heritage and look forward to commemorating it further in the future.

Finally, I would like to touch on Wrexham's potential. Wrexham is brimming with talent, especially in science, technology, engineering and maths expertise. Wockhardt UK won the UK Government contract to bottle the AstraZeneca vaccine at the start of the pandemic. Wrexham is hugely proud to have played its part in the whole of the UK vaccine programme; the vaccine was produced in England, bottled in Wales, trialled in Northern Ireland and rolled out in Scotland. We have a growing industrial estate because of ever-increasing inward investment, and it is soon to be the largest in the UK. Wrexham will be the envy of the world and will be known for its STEM innovation, manufacturing and skills. We are growing our own talent, with Wrexham Glyndwr University and Coleg Cambria both in the town, and we have ever-increasing numbers of jobs vacancies on offer.

[Sarah Atherton]

Furthering our home-grown talent, we have expanded our healthcare training in Wrexham, for example with our new nursing campus at the university and nursing cadet training at the college, all training at our local hospital, Wrexham Maelor, where I trained as a nurse some decades ago and returned during the pandemic.

In terms of art, music and tourism, Wrexham has a massive offer. Only last week it was announced that Tŷ Pawb had been shortlisted for Art Fund museum of the year, and two weeks ago 15,000 people descended on Wrexham to enjoy the FOCUS Wales music festival, which showcased emerging Welsh talent. The crowds have always been attracted to our UNESCO heritage site, the Pontcysyllte aqueduct, which recently received £13 million from the UK Government levelling-up fund to ensure its future. Many more enjoy the grand house at Erddig and Chirk castle. In fact, of the seven wonders of Wales, three are in Wrexham—St Giles' church, which dates back to the 15th century, the yew trees of Overton and the bells of Gresford church, where I got married.

I would like to put on record my thanks to the UK Government for already committing, in the levelling-up White Paper, to moving civil service jobs to Wrexham. With the Crown Prosecution Service and HMP Berwyn nearby, I am pleased that a Ministry of Justice hub is starting to develop.

To sum up, the benefits to Wrexham of being named city of culture 2025 are endless. It would bring recognition to our beautiful town and unmatched investment—something Wrexham has not seen for 20 years—and it would strengthen the Union. When I got elected in 2019, my goal was to put Wrexham on the map. Decades of Labour neglect left Wrexham deflated. There will never be a better moment for Wrexham to be recognised as a hidden gem, brimming with history, pride, potential and passion. To me, the bid for city of culture is not only about historical accolades, or how many famous singers, architects or artists came from a place. It is about what Wrexham is achieving now, and can achieve. It is about its people and its potential, and Wrexham has that in bucketloads. It just needs someone to unlock it and the Government have the key to do that. Wrexham, “We Rise Together”. Diolch yn fawr.

10.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton) for securing the debate. She rightly champions Wrexham, as she always does. She is justly proud that the county borough was the only place in Wales to be shortlisted in the fierce competition for the highly coveted UK city of culture title. Previously held by Derry-Londonderry and Hull and currently held by Coventry, it is a growing prize and a record 20 places applied this year.

This is the final debate secured for the four shortlisted places bidding for the 2025 title, and I will briefly reflect on the passion with which all hon. Members spoke about their constituencies. They highlighted the incredible heritage and cultural assets of which people across the whole United Kingdom are proud. They spoke of the dedication of their bidding teams, the ambition for positive change and the sheer number of partners who have come together to support their bids.

While this is a competition, it is worth acknowledging the transformative power of culture in all places, not just the winners. That is why the UK city of culture programme is a key part of the efforts by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to level up opportunity across the UK. It is a proven model for harnessing culture and creativity to attract investment and tourism, to bring people together and to drive economic growth, positive social change and regeneration. The title is unique in its holistic nature. It galvanises partners across sectors to ensure systematic change, promote social cohesion and wellbeing, and create a shared vision with multiple outcomes. The competition was inspired by the success of Liverpool when it was the European capital of culture in 2008, and it was designed and is delivered by DCMS in collaboration with the devolved Administrations. The Government have recently announced that the competition will be a permanent quadrennial competition, continuing in 2029 and beyond, and I am delighted that some of the unsuccessful bidders in the current competition have already declared their intention to bid again for the 2029 title.

My noble Friend Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, the Minister for Arts, recently visited all the shortlisted places, including Wrexham, and has been hugely impressed with the effort and ambition of the bidding teams and partners. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham mentioned, I had the honour of visiting Wrexham myself not so long ago and had the opportunity to visit so many of the local cultural establishments and sites that she mentioned.

The impact of the title is evident in the benefits felt by previous winners. There was more than £150 million of public and private sector investment in the 2013 winner, Derry/Londonderry, and the 2017 winner, Hull, saw 5.3 million people visiting more than 2,800 events. Coventry, despite the huge challenges posed by the pandemic, has developed an extraordinary programme of events that has put culture at the heart of the social and economic recovery. Co-created projects have taken place in all 18 wards of the city, with thousands of community dancers, musicians, poets and makers participating. The city has seen more than £172 million invested in the likes of music concerts, public art displays, the new Telegraph hotel, a new children's play area in the city centre and improvements to public transport. Coventry's year will culminate in Radio 1's Big Weekend at the end of May.

It is no wonder, therefore, that there were more initial applications for the 2025 title than ever before. Wrexham county borough, along with the three other locations—Bradford, County Durham and Southampton—was approved by the Secretary of State to make the shortlist for 2025. All the bids have been scrutinised by the expert advisory panel chaired by Sir Phil Redmond, which will continue to assess the finalists against criteria such as place making, levelling up, UK and international co-operation, opening up access to culture and creating a lasting legacy. The panel has now visited the locations on the shortlist and will make its final recommendation to DCMS Ministers following a presentation from each place this week. The winner will be announced in Coventry later this month.

As my hon. Friend said so eloquently, Wrexham county is a proud and passionate region with substantial cultural assets. For one, it boasts a UNESCO world heritage site, the Pontcysyllte aqueduct—I hope I

pronounced that right, or was close—which is the tallest aqueduct in the world. The colour splash on the bid team logo represents coal dust, as a tribute to Wrexham's industrial past, and the colours represent the vibrancy and diversity of everyone who lives, works and plays in Wrexham.

Wrexham is world-renowned for its textiles, bricks, beer, mining and much else. Of course it is also home to the world's third oldest professional football team, AFC Wrexham, and the club's recent takeover has attracted immense international interest and support. Unfortunately, I last visited Wrexham just before the acquisition of the football club by Hollywood stars Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney, and I therefore also missed out on the opportunity to visit the emerging major tourist attraction that is the urinal in the gents' toilets that was a gift from Ryan Reynolds to Rob on his birthday. I am confident that this major cultural attraction will form the centrepiece of the 2025 city of culture bid, or maybe not—I was given that opportunity to talk about urinals in the Chamber of the House of Commons, so I took it.

Wrexham is a place of myth and legend. It is a place filled with music and home-grown talent, and FOCUS Wales—one of the UK's leading music showcase festivals—welcomes more than 15,000 international artists, industry leaders and music fans from across the world to the county every year.

Wrexham's UK city of culture bid is led by the county council, alongside partners from local businesses to National Trust Wales and Transport for Wales. Wrexham's vision for 2025 includes celebrating the region's cultural diversity and becoming the UK capital of play. I am told that, on the panel's visit to Wrexham, the chair, Sir Phil Redmond, was even persuaded by young people to take a turn on a zipwire.

The bid also aims to establish Wrexham as the home of football in Wales, as the north Wales centre for trade and events and as a leader in innovation, and to promote the Welsh language and heritage. Wrexham's bid celebrates local and national heritage. As part of the bid process, the borough council awarded over 50 grants of up to £1,000 to individuals and organisations to host a multitude of events and projects to promote the county. Planned activities include the recreation of the historic Wrexham tailor's quilt; a powerchair football event to highlight Wrexham's inclusive environment for disability sports; and a special fusion event with African and Welsh food, fashion and music.

As outlined on their website, the team also aim to establish a "permanent, long-lasting legacy" of socio-economic benefits beyond their 2025 year, improving

health and wellbeing and educational outcomes. As the only Welsh region in the competition, the team anticipate that, should their bid be successful, it would have a positive impact on neighbouring regions, such as Denbighshire, Flintshire and Powys, and more broadly across Wales. In Wrexham itself, regeneration—of infrastructure and disused public spaces—is a priority.

As the competition goes from strength to strength, for the first time, each of the eight longlisted places from across the UK received a £40,000 grant to support their application ahead of the shortlisting stage. This was intended to level the playing field, reduce the burden on bidders and help them develop scalable plans. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all bidding places for participating in the competition.

As I alluded to earlier, there are clear benefits to all places that bid, as was evident from the recent visits to the shortlisted places. The bidding process engages and galvanises a wide range of local communities and organisations, resulting in enduring partnerships and pride in place. The process encourages places to develop a vision and to come together around ambitions for change. It also attracts media attention, putting places on the map.

For example, Hull was unsuccessful in winning the 2013 title but came back to win the 2017 title. Sunderland, which bid for the 2021 title, created the momentum to form a new arts trust, Sunderland Culture, which achieved enhanced Arts Council England funding and mobilised a lasting team of community volunteers. Paisley, which also bid for the 2021 title, has since raised funds for its museum and hosted a range of major events, including UNBOXED's About Us. Norwich, which bid for the 2013 title, went on to become UNESCO's city of literature.

DCMS wants all bidders to benefit from the bidding process. We are committed to working with those who do not win to continue to develop partnerships, advance culture-led change and strengthen cultural strategies, as well as to signpost upcoming opportunities and funding.

In conclusion, I commend Wrexham's commitment to winning the UK city of culture 2025 competition, and I applaud my hon. Friend's continuing championing of Wrexham. I wish all shortlisted bidders good luck in the final stage of the competition.

Question put and agreed to.

10.17 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 16 May 2022

TREASURY

Update on Carbon Leakage Mitigations

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Lucy Frazer):

The Government are taking ambitious domestic action to tackle climate change and recently opened a consultation on developing the UK emissions trading scheme (ETS), so the UK can become the world's first net zero carbon cap and trade market^[1]. While domestic action is critical, climate change is a global issue. When the UK took on the COP26 presidency, only 30% of the world was covered by net zero targets—now over 90% of the global economy is committed to net zero. In 2021, the UK placed climate change and nature at the top of the international agenda during its G7 and COP26 presidencies, presiding over the agreement of the Glasgow climate pact, to speed up the pace of climate action.

The Government also want to see other countries do more to drive down their own emissions and we continue to work on the global stage to support more ambitious international action. Recent global events and the resulting increase in energy prices reinforce the importance of transitioning to clean energy to ensure energy security and reduce our dependency on imported fossil fuels.

In parallel, Government are considering domestic action to continue to ensure the integrity of UK action to reduce its carbon emissions against carbon leakage, as our existing carbon leakage protection measures, including free allowances under the UK ETS, evolve to achieve our net zero objectives. This will also ensure that UK businesses are not disadvantaged. Carbon leakage is the displacement of production, and associated emissions, from one jurisdiction to another, due to different levels of carbon pricing and climate regulation across those jurisdictions.

The best way to prevent carbon leakage would be for all countries to move together in pricing, regulating, and therefore reducing carbon emissions. We are strongly committed to working with our international partners to develop a common global approach to carbon leakage. Multilateral solutions can take time to develop, however, and while we will continue to work on international solutions with partners, options for domestic action must be considered in parallel.

The Government are therefore exploring a range of policies that could mitigate future carbon leakage risk. These include policies to grow the market for low emissions industrial products, on which the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy recently undertook a call for evidence. Today, we are announcing that it is our intention to consult later in the year on a range of carbon leakage mitigation options, including on whether measures such as product standards and a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) could be appropriate tools in the UK's policy mix. A CBAM applies a carbon price to specified imports, in order to mitigate differences in carbon pricing between jurisdictions, and therefore reduce the risk of carbon leakage.

The Government are clear that any policy or policies would need to carefully balance a range of priorities for the UK, both domestically and internationally, including compliance with WTO rules and our staunch commitment to free and open trade, alongside taking into account the needs of developing countries. As we determine our approach to carbon leakage, we will continue our ongoing engagement with our domestic and international partners.

^[1]: Developing the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) — GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[HCWS26]

EDUCATION

Condition Improvement Fund

The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):

My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System (Baroness Barran) has made the following statement.

Today, I am announcing the allocation of £498 million for 1,405 Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) projects across 1,129 academies, sixth-form colleges and voluntary aided schools to maintain and improve the condition of the education estate.

This funding is provided to enable schools to provide well maintained facilities and give students safe environments that support a high-quality education. Since March 2015 CIF has delivered 9,148 projects and continues to deliver 1,905 projects across the school estate with essential maintenance projects.

Details of this announcement have been sent to all CIF applicants and a list of successful projects has been published on www.gov.uk. I will also place copies in the House Library.

[HCWS28]

Initial Teacher Training Reform Programme

The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):

Today, the Department for Education (DfE) informed applicants of the outcomes of the first accreditation round of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) reform programme. Eighty applicants have been awarded accreditation so far, and a second round will open for applications on 23 May and close on 27 June. We will announce the successful applicants of both rounds when the process is complete in the autumn.

In December 2021, the Government announced a set of reforms to ITT that leads to qualified teacher status. The reforms, which centre around a new set of “quality requirements”, aim to ensure greater quality, consistency and coherence in ITT, building on earlier reforms to teacher development.

To deliver ITT from September 2024, both existing and prospective providers of ITT must pass a new accreditation process. This process has been designed to assess applicants' capability and capacity to deliver the highest quality ITT in line with the new quality requirements, which will become part of the ITT criteria from the 2024-25 academic year.

From the autumn, accredited providers will proceed to the quality assurance stage. In this stage, providers will work with the DfE to ensure that all ITT courses are fully developed in line with the new 2024-25 ITT criteria. The DfE will also work with accredited providers ahead of 2024 delivery to ensure that they have strong partnerships in place to provide sufficient training places in the subjects, phases and geographies in which they are needed. Further details will be published in due course.

The accreditation process was designed to be rigorous but proportionate, and I am confident that the evaluation of applications for accreditation has been thorough, undertaken jointly by trained DfE and Ofsted assessors.

Applicants who were not awarded accreditation in round one have been given feedback on their application to help them understand the areas they need to address, should they wish to re-apply in round two. Both existing and prospective providers who did not apply in round one are being encouraged to do so in round two.

If an applicant decides not to re-apply, we are encouraging them to consider partnering with newly accredited providers to build strong families of providers ready for 2024 delivery and ensure a high-quality and sufficient ITT market.

I am confident that these reforms will help create a truly world-class teacher development system that makes England the best place in the world to become a great teacher.

[HCWS27]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

International Development Strategy

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): Today we have laid out our vision for the future of UK international development. Development will be at the heart of the UK's foreign policy, which uses all the levers available—including development, diplomacy, investment, trade, defence and intelligence—to deliver on our foreign policy objectives.

The strategy will help address increasing global challenges, delivering investment, supporting women and girls, getting humanitarian assistance to those who need it most, and continuing our work on climate change, nature and global health.

The strategy, which builds on a proud record of global leadership on development, will challenge dependency on malign actors, offering choice and bringing more countries into the orbit of free-market economies.

We will use British international investment and other tools to provide honest and reliable finance to help low and middle-income countries take control of their futures, giving them an alternative so they are not burdened with unsustainable debt with strings attached. This approach will help deliver the clean green initiative, supporting countries to grow their economies sustainably.

The strategy will rebalance the aid budget towards bilateral programmes. This will give the Government greater control over how money is spent, allowing a focus on priorities and improving lives around the world.

The international development strategy sets out four priorities where the UK can meet the needs of partner countries around the world:

Delivering honest, reliable investment through British investment partnerships, building on the UK's financial expertise and the strengths of the City of London, and delivering the Prime Minister's vision for the clean green initiative—supporting countries to grow their economies sustainably.

Providing women and girls with the freedom they need to succeed. We intend to restore the bilateral budget to help unlock their potential, educate girls, support their empowerment and protect them against violence.

Stepping-up our life-saving humanitarian work to prevent the worst forms of human suffering around the world. We will prioritise humanitarian funding levels at around £3 billion over the next three years, to remain a leader in crisis response.

Taking forward our work on climate change, nature and global health. We are putting the commitments of our presidency of G7 and COP26, and our covid-19 response, at the core of our international development offer.

Our new approach will:

Spend more on country and bilateral programmes rather than through multilateral organisations, empowering the UK to deliver more aid directly to where it is needed. By 2025, the FCDO intends to spend around three quarters of its aid budget allocated at the 2021 spending review bilaterally.

Use world-class British expertise to support partner countries by providing advice, exchanging lessons and evidence of what works, and building partnerships across Government, research, business and civil society.

Cut back red tape and excessive bureaucracy around delivering aid and give ambassadors and high commissioners greater authority to get programmes delivering on the ground quickly.

Sustain our commitment to Africa and ensure our development programmes in the Indo Pacific remain a critical part of our ambition to increase our focus on the region.

This strategy sets the direction for all of the UK's development work. The FCDO will oversee cross-Government efforts to deliver the strategy and draw upon the expertise of the private sector, civil society and academia to advise and challenge us on implementation.

[HCWS25]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

High Fat, Sugar or Salt Products: Delay in Volume Price Promotion and Advertising Restrictions

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): The Government are delaying the implementation of the volume price promotion restrictions and the introduction of further advertising restrictions on TV and online for high fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) products by 12 months.

We are clear that the delay to volume price promotions does not impact the locations measures which will still come into force on 1 October 2022. Under these measures, less healthy products in scope will no longer be promoted in key locations, such as checkouts, store entrances,

aisle ends and their online equivalents. We expect these location restrictions to be the single most impactful obesity policy at reducing children's calorie consumption and are expected to accrue health benefits of over £57 billion and provide NHS savings of over £4 billion, over the next 25 years.

The delay to restrictions on multibuy deals will allow the Government to review and monitor the impact of the restrictions on the cost of living in light of an unprecedented global economic situation.

A delay to the advertising restrictions is necessary because a delay in the Health and Care Act 2022 receiving Royal Assent has had a consequential impact on the timetable for the regulators' subsequent consultations and publication of final guidance, meaning it was unlikely this would be ready with sufficient time before implementation.

We have also considered the ongoing concerns from industry about having time to fully implement the final guidance, by restructuring their funding and revenue

streams appropriately, and ensuring robust compliance from implementation. We therefore believe this is the best approach to balance tackling childhood obesity in a timely way, managing the unprecedented economic situation and ensuring the smooth and effective implementation of these restrictions. The advertising regulations will now come into force on 1 January 2024.

We included a power in the Health and Care Act to delay implementation of the advertising restrictions if necessary. We will be utilising this power to amend the date of implementation for the advertising restrictions by secondary legislation. The implementation of the volume price restrictions will also be amended by secondary legislation.

This Government remain committed to halving childhood obesity by 2030 and these measures and others, including last month's new measures on calorie labelling in large restaurants, cafes and takeaways, will play their part in delivering against this ambition.

[HCWS29]

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