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**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 3 July 2023**

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# House of Commons

*Monday 3 July 2023*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HOME DEPARTMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Net Migration

1. **Sarah Atherton** (Wrexham) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce net migration. [905731]

19. **James Daly** (Bury North) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce net migration. [905750]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** Net migration is too high, and this Government are determined to bring it down. Indeed, that was one of the reasons why I voted and campaigned to leave the European Union in 2016. Last month, I announced measures to reduce the number of student dependants coming to the UK, which has soared by 35%, and to stop people transferring from student visas to work visas. We expect net migration to return to sustainable levels over time, and immigration policy is under constant review.

**Sarah Atherton:** The Labour-Plaid coalition in Cardiff has declared Wales a “sanctuary for all.” The world is welcome. However, its Ukrainian super-sponsor scheme fell apart due to a lack of accommodation and planning, with families still crammed into single rooms. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Welsh Labour Government about the collapse of their super-sponsor scheme? Does she know how many families are still inappropriately placed?

**Suella Braverman:** We are very proud of this country’s track record on providing sanctuary to people in need, and I am very proud of the support that the Government have given to Ukrainians fleeing Putin’s barbaric war. But when it comes to broader accommodation costs relating to asylum seekers, it is clear that we are spending far too much—£6 million a day, or £3 billion a year—on housing asylum seekers in hotels.

My hon. Friend raises a very important point. She speaks frankly to Labour’s abject failure to offer any viable plan for support. Labour is naive about the problem, and it is unrealistic about the solution. Labour has no idea and no plan, and it is letting Wales down.

**James Daly:** Do the Government have any plans to amend the minimum salary requirement for the skilled worker visa scheme?

**Suella Braverman:** We always keep the salary threshold under review but, as I said, net migration is too high and we need to get overall numbers down. How do we do that? Well, employers need to recruit more people who are already here, rather than advertising abroad so much. We also need to get more people off welfare and back into economic activity, and our welfare reforms will help with that objective. We cannot ignore the pressure that record levels of people coming to the UK puts on housing supply, public services and community relations. That is why we need to focus on lowering net migration.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Of course, net emigration is the problem in some parts of the UK. Will the Home Secretary pay attention to the plight of our economy in the lakes and dales, where almost two thirds of businesses are failing to meet demand because of a lack of workforce? I have been speaking to the Minister for Immigration about a youth mobility visa scheme, negotiated bilaterally with other countries in Europe, to solve our economic needs so that our hospitality and tourism industries can survive. How is the Home Secretary getting on with those discussions?

**Suella Braverman:** Migration is a very complex issue, and of course we have to balance the needs of the labour market. That is why we are very pleased to support well-crafted youth mobility schemes. There is one with India, and I have just come back from New Zealand, where we have expanded our youth mobility scheme. They are great schemes that allow the exchange of young people, who can come here to serve and work in our economy.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is very clear that the issue of migration must be settled and sorted out. At the same time, it is important to note that those who have come from eastern Europe, the middle east and Africa are contributing to the economy of my Strangford constituency. I think the Secretary of State is committed to ensuring that continues, but what discussions has she had with the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that we continue to have the workers we need?

**Suella Braverman:** No single measure can control net migration, but as the Prime Minister has been clear, net migration is too high. That is why I recently announced a series of measures aimed at reducing the number of student dependants, which has risen exponentially over the past few years, and ensuring that students come here in a more proportionate and balanced way.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Home Secretary.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary wish the deputy chairman of the Conservative party, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), a speedy recovery from the terrible bug that I understand has, this morning, prevented him from launching an entirely different Conservative immigration policy from the policy of the Conservative Home Secretary? Does she agree with him that social care visas should be cancelled—yes or no?

**Suella Braverman:** The sorry fact of the matter is that Labour wants open borders and unlimited migration. There is a malaise descending upon the Labour party, and it does not even know what it thinks. Labour's Sadiq Khan has said that he wants more migration. Labour's party chairman has confirmed that numbers could rise under a Labour Government. When the shadow Home Secretary was asked whether she wanted net migration to rise or fall, she, in the characteristic style we have come to know and love, could not even answer the question. That is what we always get with Labour—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I just say that you have no responsibility for the Labour party and, in fairness, this is Home Office questions?

**Yvette Cooper:** The Home Secretary could not answer the question: does she support her own social care visas or not? She spent all weekend briefing that she agrees with her Back Benchers, but today she cannot even answer the basic question. Making up stuff about the Labour party will not help her when her party has been in power for 13 years and when work visas have doubled, exactly because the Government have failed to tackle skills shortages or issues in the labour market.

This is total chaos. We have a Rwanda policy that is not removing anyone; an impact assessment that says her policies will not work and will cost much more; a 50% drop in removals of foreign criminals—the inspector says this is because the Home Office cannot even identify who can be removed; a record number of people in hotels; a record high asylum backlog; and Back Benchers writing the Home Secretary's immigration policy because they do not think she is up to the job. It has been a humiliating few weeks for the Home Secretary—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Sorry, but you are not going to take advantage of me in that way—that is totally unfair. I cannot pull one side up and allow the other to take advantage of it. I expect all the Back Benchers to be able to get their questions in today. This is about everybody having the same opportunity to get involved, so please do not do that again.

**Suella Braverman:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. We all know that only the Conservative party and this Prime Minister have a serious plan to stop the boats and stop illegal migration, and that Labour stands for only one thing: open borders and unlimited migration. Labour Members would rather spend their time campaigning to block the deportation of foreign criminals than back our Illegal Migration Bill. They are on the side of the criminal gangs, not on the side of the British people.

### Industrial Hemp Licensing

2. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): Whether her Department has had recent discussions with the industrial hemp industry on licensing. [905732]

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** The hon. Gentleman will recall that the two of us met just a few weeks ago, on 17 May, together with industry representatives, to discuss hemp licensing. I thank him for taking the time and trouble to organise that meeting. As he knows, there is a light-touch process for licensing industrial hemp. Since 2013, the number of hemp licences has increased from six to 134.

**Ronnie Cowan:** I recollect the conversation well. We have an opportunity within the UK to grow hemp on an industrial scale and so feed many growing industries that use hemp to produce environmentally friendly products. The growth of these industries has been hampered by overly complicated regulations and a poor application process. Meanwhile, foreign companies are racing ahead in this arena. To protect UK farmers and encourage UK industry, will the Minister consider giving the licensing process over to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and making the process farmer friendly?

**Chris Philp:** It is, of course, important to make sure that UK industry can compete globally, and a light-touch regulatory framework is important in that. We should be aware that some parts of the plant contain high levels of THC—tetrahydrocannabinol—and do need regulation, which is the Home Office's concern. I will be meeting DEFRA colleagues in the near future to make sure that our approach to regulation is as light-touch as possible, because, like him, I want to see our domestic industry flourish and I do not want any excessive regulation.

### Police Funding Formula

3. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What recent progress her Department has made on reviewing the police funding formula. [905733]

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** The Government have said they will be reviewing the police funding formula, and I hope to have news for the House in the relatively near future about initiating the consultation process. The formula is quite out of date and it needs overhauling, and we are working on that.

**Andrew Selous:** The record number of 1,455 police officers in Bedfordshire and the recent £6 million special grant are both very welcome indeed, but does the Minister recognise that it is simply not fair or right to go on funding a force with a series of one-off special grants that really need to be part of core funding?

**Chris Philp:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. I should take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Bedfordshire police and crime commissioner, Festus Akinbusoye, who has done a fantastic job for the people of Bedfordshire. He advocated for more funding via the special grant and was successful. He is a great representative for the people of Bedfordshire and I am pleased that he has delivered record police numbers in Bedfordshire, just as the Government have delivered record numbers of police across the whole of England and Wales.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): The chief constable of West Yorkshire police, John Robins QPM, recently told the BBC that his force does not have the resources that it needs to deliver the service that the public expect. Cutting through the spin, he said that the force was down 2,000 staff and £140 million since 2010. He said his force could deal with major incidents and crimes, but only at a cost to neighbourhood policing. This comes from a force that was rated outstanding in planning and the use of resources in its latest inspection by His Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and

rescue services. Which bit of policing does the Minister think should not be done because forces simply do not have the resources?

**Chris Philp:** The shadow Minister will know that in the police funding settlement for this year, 2023-24, there is around about £500 million extra—in fact, it is slightly over £500 million—for police forces up and down the country. That has enabled us to deliver a record number of officers ever. There are 149,572 officers—about 3,500 more than there were under the last Labour Government. In West Yorkshire, which the shadow Minister asked about, neighbourhood crime is down by 30% since 2019 and overall crime—excluding fraud and computer misuse, which came into the figures only recently—is down by 52% since 2010. I am still waiting for the shadow Home Secretary to apologise for being a member of a Government who presided over crime levels that are double those we have today.

### Asylum Application Backlog

4. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What recent progress her Department has made on reducing the backlog of asylum applications. [905734]

21. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What recent progress her Department has made on reducing the backlog of asylum applications. [905752]

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick):** We are making good progress, and the latest Home Office statistics show that asylum decisions are up, with a 35% increase since last year in the number made. Productivity has increased, and we are on track to have 2,500 decision makers by September, which represents a quadrupling of the number of case workers.

**Chi Onwurah:** Like many Members from all parties, I am constantly contacted by refugees who are desperate to know what is happening to their asylum claim after years of waiting, so I asked the Home Office how many refugees in Newcastle had been waiting for one, two, three, four and five years. The answer came back that the Home Office does not know—it does not even record the data. Instead of indulging in unworkable, unethical, illegal and unaffordable flights of Rwandan fantasy, why does the Home Secretary not focus on her day job and fix the asylum backlog?

**Robert Jenrick:** As I just said, we are making good progress on reducing the asylum backlog. Important though the reducing the backlog is, however, it cannot be the totality of a plan. This is the point that the Labour party does not seem to understand: we have to stop the boats coming in the first place. That is the only sustainable way to tackle the issue. Even if we grant our way out of this problem, as the shadow Home Secretary seems to propose, the pressures on the state still remain; they are simply transferred to local authorities and the benefits system, and the British taxpayer continues to pick up the bill.

**Kevin Brennan:** The Minister has an interesting definition of being “on track”; did the number of decision makers not fall between January and May this year, from 1,333 to 1,280?

A constituent recently passed on to me a letter from a firm of local solicitors that said:

“All possible avenues have been considered to avoid this situation but regrettably, the Home Office’s long term failure to progress asylum claims, and current Government immigration policy, has made it financially unsustainable for”

these solicitors

“to continue Legally Aided work.”

How does it help us as MPs on both sides of the House in our constituency offices, and how does it help with the backlog that the Home Office says it wants to reduce, to make sure that people do not have the legal representation they need to unblock the system and allow progress in asylum cases?

**Robert Jenrick:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the problem with our asylum system is not a lack of lawyers; there are plenty of legal representatives around. We have had strong overall progress on the backlog, and I am pleased to say that the early data that I have received suggests that last week saw the best performance in four years.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I know how seriously the Minister takes dealing with the legacy backlog, but, as the Home Secretary showed at the recent Home Affairs Committee, in order to deal with that backlog in the timeframe that the Government have set themselves it would require at least a quadrupling of the number of cases being dealt with as from 1 June. Even with the extra 500 staff appointed at Stoke, that will be challenging. Will the Minister give me an assurance that, if we have not managed to clear the backlog before the end of the year, it will not be done by a blanket amnesty?

**Robert Jenrick:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and I explicitly chose not to pursue the blanket amnesty approach that the previous Labour Government pursued. Instead, we put in the hard yards to improve productivity by streamlining processes, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, ensuring that, where appropriate, interviews were conducted in a timely fashion, and recruiting more decision makers. Since my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary appeared before the Committee, I am pleased to say that the data coming out of our caseworking team is very strong. We are seeing significant progress. As I just said, early indication suggests that last week was the best for over four years.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): I am a bit mystified. Given that 95% of these applications are successful, is it not the case that, if we speed up the process and make it easier and easier, more and more people will come? Is not the only solution to detain people and to deport them—offshore them? Those who suggest anything else are living in cloud cuckoo land and every single county will face what we face in Lincolnshire with thousands of illegal migrants having to be housed in unsuitable places. Let us have an answer for once.

**Robert Jenrick:** The approach that the Home Secretary and I have taken has been both to ensure that, where there are high grant rate nationalities, cases are pursued swiftly, and where there are low grant rate nationalities, such as Albanians—individuals from a safe European



country—who can and should be returned as quickly as possible, we do just that. At this point last year, 30% of those arriving on small boats were coming from Albania; today, it is less than 2%. That arrangement is clearly making good progress. None the less, my right hon. Friend makes an important point: those who suggest that we can simply grant our way out of this problem are, I am afraid, hopelessly naive. The idea that the individuals coming across on small boats will, in most cases, make a significant net contribution to our economy is wrong. The costs to the taxpayer are very significant. The ongoing costs of education, access to welfare and community cohesion are very significant, which is why we need to stop the boats in the first place.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): The Government's destruction of their own asylum system can best be described as an act of arson and their plans to fix it are utterly farcical. They have sent more Home Secretaries than asylum seekers to Rwanda. They sent the Prime Minister on a victory lap in Dover, apparently failing to notice that the weather improves over the summer and the boat numbers increase. And they were in such a flap about losing votes on their bigger backlog Bill that they resorted to dragging Lord Lebedev of Siberia into the Division Lobby. Now the Court of Appeal ruling has revealed that Rwanda is able to process only 100 claims per year—around 0.3% of those who arrived on small boats last year. Can the Minister tell me what he is planning to do with the remaining 99.7%, and does he therefore agree that the prospect of the Rwanda plan actually deterring any migrant from crossing the channel is close to zero?

**Robert Jenrick:** I used to say that the Labour party does not have a plan, but the truth is that it does have a plan, but it is a plan that would make things significantly worse. It is a plan that would ensure more granting of cases; more safe and legal routes, so even more individuals would come here; more hotels; and more cost to the British taxpayer. What is so disgraceful is the level of hypocrisy. We only have to look at the record of Welsh Labour to see that. In Wales, the Welsh Minister for Social Justice declared on 15 occasions in the Senedd that Labour-run Wales was “a nation of sanctuary”, but across the same period, Labour-run Wales accommodated 176 fewer asylum seekers. In fact, the latest published data shows that Labour-run Wales has taken just half the number of people that it should per capita.

#### **Illegal Migration Bill: Devolved Administrations**

5. **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Whether she has had recent discussions with the devolved Administrations on the Illegal Migration Bill. [905735]

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick):** I have engaged regularly with the devolved Administrations on the Illegal Migration Bill since its introduction in March, in addition to my periodic meetings with my ministerial counterparts on a variety of immigration issues. Most recently, I met the Scottish Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees in May. Looking ahead, the Bill is on the agenda for the inter-ministerial

group for safety, security and migration, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will chair later this month.

**Chris Stephens:** The Bill will place restrictions on the powers of Scottish Ministers, removing the entitlement for victims of human trafficking and exploitation to access Scottish Government-funded support services, and will undermine the Scottish Government's ability to deliver on their trafficking and exploitation strategy. We know what route the Government's damaging ideology is dragging them down, but why should Scotland's elected Parliament and the devolved Administrations be dragged down the same route, when it is abundantly clear that we want no part of the hostile environment ideology?

**Robert Jenrick:** If the Scottish Government cared so deeply about this issue, they would accommodate more asylum seekers. The SNP Government are accommodating just 4.5% of the total asylum population being accommodated in the UK, when Scotland makes up 8.1% of the UK population. I took the time to look at some of the statistics for those local authorities in Scotland where the SNP is the largest party: Clackmannanshire, zero asylum seekers; Dundee, zero asylum seekers; East Ayrshire, zero; East Dunbartonshire, zero; Midlothian, zero; North Ayrshire—want to take a guess, Mr Speaker?—zero; North Lanarkshire, six—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. No, no, no—you are going to get my drift. We cannot read out phone numbers. This is not the “Yellow Pages” advert. One or two statistics are fine, but when we get to five I really do worry. Let us have the SNP spokesperson.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Minister clearly thinks that that is a very clever line, but he knows well that Glasgow takes more refugees per head of population than any other local authority in the United Kingdom. The line he is trotting out is simply wrong and it is insulting to all those in Scotland who have opened their homes to Ukrainians, the communities across the country who have welcomed Syrians and the volunteers in the big cities who work with asylum seekers every day, helping them to overcome trauma. If he wants Scotland to do more to welcome refugees, when is he going to devolve the power and the financial levers that would allow us to do so?

**Robert Jenrick:** For good reason, immigration is a reserved matter, but the statistics I have just read out make the point as clear as can be. The SNP tries its very best to undermine the Government's work to stop the boats, but it refuses to accommodate these people when they arrive, and the costs of its fake humanitarianism are borne by everyone but itself. That is not just hypocrisy; it is deeply irresponsible, and the public have had enough.

**Patrick Grady:** It is not the Scottish Government's policy towards immigration, refugees and asylum seekers that has been ruled unlawful by the Court of Appeal. If the Minister wants the system to work and he wants the Scottish Government to do their part, he must take more action to clear the backlog, as we have heard; there must be proper safe and legal rights for people to arrive; and they must be given the right to work when they get here, because then they can pay for their own accommodation and they will not cost the taxpayer money.

**Robert Jenrick:** Just the other day, the Home Office suggested to the Scottish Government that a vessel that had been used to house Ukrainian refugees in Leith could be used for others who are asylum seekers—the same vessel, the same port, the same provider, the same package. What did the SNP say? No.

### Illegal Migration Bill: UN Refugee Convention

6. **Ms Anum Qaisar** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the compatibility of the Illegal Migration Bill with the 1951 UN refugee convention. [905736]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** While I am pleased that the Court of Appeal found that the Government are not in breach of our obligations under the refugee convention, I fundamentally disagree with the judgment that Rwanda is not a safe place for refugees and we are seeking permission to appeal. The Government take our international obligations very seriously and we are satisfied that the provisions in the Illegal Migration Bill comply with the refugee convention. The fundamental principle remains, however, that those in need of protection should claim asylum at the earliest opportunity and in the first safe country that they reach.

**Ms Qaisar:** The Home Secretary and the Government website say that they are satisfied that the provisions of the Illegal Migration Bill comply with the 1951 UN refugee convention. I am looking for clarity from the Home Secretary. What exactly is it about persecuting the most vulnerable groups, creating a hostile environment and stripping people of their right to seek safety that complies so well with the UN refugee convention?

**Suella Braverman:** As I have made clear, we take our international obligations very seriously, and we are satisfied that the Bill complies with the refugee convention. With respect to the hon. Lady, I will not take lectures from the SNP on this matter. SNP Members are, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) said, the phoney humanitarians in this debate. They are happy to support asylum seekers as long as they are nowhere near Scotland. When they stop opposing the vessel in Leith, which will house more asylum seekers, then we can have a serious conversation.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): The UN Refugee Agency has its own asylum seeker relocation programme: it flies asylum seekers from Libya to Rwanda in a scheme part-funded by the European Union. How on earth can Rwanda be deemed not to be a safe country if the UN Refugee Agency itself is using it as a safe haven?

**Suella Braverman:** As always, my hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and I could not agree with him more. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees runs an extensive scheme in Rwanda, and supports the resettlement of many thousands of migrants. I met some of them in my recent visit to Rwanda. They are happy and grateful for the generosity and welcome that Rwanda has offered them, which has allowed them to restart their lives. I am frankly very disappointed by the constant smears and assumptions, which are based on

outdated and ignorant views, denigrating our allies in Rwanda. I am nothing but grateful to our partners in Rwanda for the continued co-operation.

### Street Crime by Young People

7. **Gordon Henderson** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle street crime by young people. [905737]

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** I am pleased to report that, according to the crime survey, violence is down by 41% and criminal damage is down by 68% since 2010. But we would like to do more. That is why we now have record numbers of police and why we are investing in the safer streets fund, £200 million in the Youth Endowment Fund and £170 million in violence reduction units. We have also launched our antisocial behaviour strategy, about which the Home Secretary will speak in a moment.

Now is a good time to put on the record an intervention made by Mr Speaker in his capacity as the Member of Parliament for Chorley. Thanks to his recent intervention with me and the chief constable, Chorley town centre is one of the areas that will receive antisocial behaviour hotspot patrols, and I am sure that the people of Chorley are very grateful to Mr Speaker for the intervention that he made on their behalf.

**Gordon Henderson:** Well done, Mr Speaker!

I thank the Minister for his reply. Some young people who are arrested because they are guilty of antisocial behaviour, or so-called low-level crime, are released without charge because there is a reluctance to criminalise them. Too often, those youngsters go on to commit further multiple crimes, and are arrested and released without charge each time. What steps will my right hon. Friend take to end this roundabout of unpunished crime and ensure that young people who repeatedly break the law are not released without charge but are treated as what they are—criminals?

**Chris Philp:** We want to see tougher action on things such as antisocial behaviour and public drug use; we should have zero tolerance for any of those things. As part of the ASB strategy we are launching instant justice, whereby people who perpetrate acts of antisocial behaviour will rapidly—ideally within 48 hours—be made to do clean-ups and those kinds of things in their local area, to pay back visibly, publicly, rapidly and with enforcement. We are trialling that in 10 police force areas, starting this month, and it will be rolled out to every police force in the country, with funding, by April next year. I completely agree with everything my hon. Friend said.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): The Minister may not be aware that I was chair of the cross-party Youth Violence Commission. We published an interim report in 2018 and a final one in 2020. Our first recommendation was for the Government to adopt a public health approach to tackling violence through regional violence reduction units and long-term strategies. What action is the Minister taking to ensure that violence reduction units have the long-term funding that they need to achieve the best possible outcomes?

**Chris Philp:** I agree with the approach that the hon. Lady sets out, and we have already taken action. She asks about long-term plans. She will be aware that the Youth Endowment Fund of £210 million is a 10-year programme, and that violence reduction units—called violence reduction partnerships in some places—have so far received £170 million, and receive funding each and every year, including an allocation this year. The kinds of things that we find work include diversionary activities for young people. In fact, when I asked the chief executive of the YEF what the most effective intervention is, he said that it was cognitive behavioural therapy, which gets used as well. I repeat one statistic that I mentioned earlier: since 2010, violence is down by 41% and criminal damage by 68%.

**Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab):** A report today found that nearly half of women who experienced or witnessed a crime in the past year chose not to report it because they did not believe that the police would treat it seriously. His Majesty's inspector, in his latest state of policing report, said that the police were experiencing one of their biggest crises in living memory, there were widespread systematic failings and they were simply not getting the basics right.

Having pushed our British model of policing by consent to the very brink, do the Government take responsibility, do they agree with the inspector that substantial reform is essential, and will they back Labour's plans to restore neighbourhood policing, halve serious violence and raise confidence in every force—or is the Minister happy to keep twiddling his thumbs while the criminals get away with it?

**Chris Philp:** I must say, in the gentlest terms, that my constituency neighbour has a bit of cheek to talk about reducing crime, given that according to the crime survey, crime levels under the last Labour Government were around double what they are today. *[Interruption.]* She shakes her head, but that is from the Office for National Statistics, and it is the only statistically recognised long-term measure of crime. If she does not like the ONS figures, she can go and argue with it. She might not like them, but those are the figures.

In relation to the hon. Lady's serious question about RASSO—rape and serious sexual offences—particularly on women, the proportion being reported is much higher than it was a few years ago, which is welcome. There is a lot more to do, which is why there is a rape review and a rape action plan. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines), are working hard on that. Operation Soteria Bluestone was fully rolled out at the end of June, just a few days ago, and we have seen a significant increase in the number of relevant charges. They are still too low, and they need to be higher, which is why we have invested in more RASSO specialist officers, and that work is continuing.

### Antisocial Behaviour

9. **Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to help tackle antisocial behaviour. [905739]

14. **Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab):** Whether her Department plans to increase police resources to help tackle antisocial behaviour. [905745]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** Earlier in the year, I launched the antisocial behaviour action plan, which includes increasing funding for police and crime commissioners by over £100 million, delivering stronger and swifter punishment, increasing police visibility in response, and banning nitrous oxide. Antisocial behaviour is not a low-level crime. It blights communities, and that is why the Government are committed to tackling it effectively.

**Mike Amesbury:** Today, to coincide with Anti-social Behaviour Awareness Week, the all-party parliamentary group on antisocial behaviour has published a report with the charity Resolve ASB, which demonstrates, among other things, that 1.7 million people a day experience antisocial behaviour. Some 58% believe that the Government are not doing enough. Will the Home Secretary meet members of the all-party parliamentary group and me to look at the recommendations in that report?

**Suella Braverman:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his work on the all-party parliamentary group, and I am sure that the Policing Minister and/or I will meet him to learn more about the vital work that he has led. May I take the opportunity to applaud the officers of Cheshire police force in the hon. Gentleman's area? I have had the pleasure of meeting the excellent chief constable, Mark Roberts. I applaud the Conservative police and crime commissioner, John Dwyer, who has rolled out a scheme on antisocial behaviour that provides more CCTV and increases the first-responder response. There is a record number of police officers in Cheshire, and the force has received over £3 million-worth of safer streets funding. The results are a 26% fall in neighbourhood crime and a 17% fall in drugs offences in Cheshire. That is common-sense policing, thanks to the police officers and Government support.

**Stephen Morgan:** Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary is one of the lowest-funded police forces in the UK, and with a decade of cuts to youth services, antisocial behaviour has been left to thrive under this Government. We have seen the consequences at South Parade pier, the Camber and many other places in Portsmouth. Neighbourhood policing is vital in cracking down on ASB, which ruins so many lives. Therefore, what explanation can the Home Secretary provide for halving the number of police community support officers over the past 13 years?

**Suella Braverman:** The hon. Gentleman and I represent constituencies that are served by the same police force, and I am really proud of the track record in Hampshire. I am really proud of how the new chief constable, Scott Chilton, has assumed his role, with a real focus on back-to-basics policing; I am really proud of how the Conservative police and crime commissioner, Donna Jones, has led initiatives so that every community in Hampshire will have named, dedicated police officers and PCSOs serving them, bolstering neighbourhood policing and building confidence; and I am really proud of the fact that Hampshire has seen a 15% fall in neighbourhood crime since 2019—common-sense policing serving the community.



**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that some of the principal victims of antisocial behaviour are young people? The Government are absolutely right to bring forward new measures to tackle antisocial behaviour to make our streets, parks and public spaces safer for the vast majority of young people who do not engage in those negative behaviours.

**Suella Braverman**: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. There is such a need for greater diversion and greater support for young people, so that they do not spend their time loitering in shopping centres, causing a nuisance in car parks or harassing members of the community. That is why our antisocial behaviour action plan commits considerable funding—over £160 million of new funding—including for an increased police presence in ASB hotspot areas and to support the roll-out of diversionary resources to support young people so that they do not fall into crime and antisocial behaviour.

**Mr Speaker**: Youth zones are exceptional, especially the Chorley Inspire one.

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): Yet again, in Ilkley and Marley in my constituency, Travellers have set up camp, caused damage and intimidated residents, which just last weekend resulted in Ilkley pool having to close temporarily. When they have gone, they leave a complete mess, which all has to be cleaned up at taxpayers' expense. Will the Home Secretary meet me to discuss what additional support West Yorkshire police and our local council can get to address this ongoing issue?

**Suella Braverman**: My hon. Friend raises a really important point about illegal encampments and Travellers who blight communities by causing a nuisance and who, in some cases, threaten communities—it is unacceptable behaviour. That is why we legislated in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 to toughen up the powers and measures available to the police, so that they can take more robust steps in relation to this issue, but I am very happy to speak to my hon. Friend about what more can be done locally.

### Asylum Accommodation: Hotels

10. **Mrs Paulette Hamilton** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): What recent progress her Department has made on reducing the use of hotels as contingency asylum accommodation. [905740]

15. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What recent progress her Department has made on reducing the use of hotels as contingency asylum accommodation. [905746]

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick)**: The Home Office seeks to end the use of hotels and to move asylum seekers to less expensive, more suitable accommodation. To support that, we are bringing into use large, disused military sites and vessels, which will provide adequate, safe, secure, non-detained accommodation for asylum seekers and also reduce the pull factor to the United Kingdom.

**Mrs Hamilton**: I recently received an email from the Home Office that said that the use of hotels to house asylum seekers is “inappropriate”, and that reliance on them must be reduced. In the same email, the Home Office informed me that it planned to increase the use of hotel accommodation for asylum seekers in my constituency of Erdington by 159%—the single biggest increase in the whole of Birmingham. How on earth can the Minister expect the country to trust him when he cannot even keep his policies consistent within the same email?

**Robert Jenrick**: The policy that we have adopted is one of maximising the capacity of the hotels that we have for as long as we have them. That is saving the taxpayer at least a quarter of a billion pounds and reducing reliance on hotels elsewhere in the country. I do appreciate that there are pressures on the hon. Lady's local authority, and I also appreciate that some Labour local authorities, such as Westminster City Council, say that asylum seekers must be housed in individual, ensuite bedrooms. We do not agree with that: it is a gross waste of taxpayers' money that would make the UK a soft touch.

**Jeff Smith**: In my constituency, I have had the same experience as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton), but the question I want to ask is about unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Home Office still has not explained how it is going to find the children missing from asylum accommodation, so will it set out the plans to do that and find these vulnerable people?

**Robert Jenrick**: We have been very clear that we and the police take extremely seriously any young person who goes missing from a hotel or any other form of accommodation. Local police forces and Home Office personnel treat that exactly as they would any other child going missing and they conduct a full missing person inquiry. However, the only sustainable answer to young people living in hotels is to stop the boats in the first place. Doing nothing is not an option. Doing nothing will lead to more young people living in those hotels and being exposed to human traffickers.

**James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): While I do very much welcome the Minister's determination to move away from hotels and towards other accommodation, will he give particular attention to the Wiltshire hotel and golf club in my constituency? The number there has gone up: there are now 120 people there, and they are all crammed into very small accommodation. It is not only bad from the point of view of the golf club members and neighbouring long-term residents with them in housing next door, but it is an extremely bad place from the point of view of the asylum seekers. They have nowhere to go and nothing to do. They have no education facilities and no religious facilities. They are stuck in the middle of the countryside with no transport, and it is quite the wrong place for them to be. Will the Minister please give particular attention to the Wiltshire hotel?

**Robert Jenrick**: I am familiar with the hotel in my hon. Friend's constituency and the concerns he has raised. I will take a look at that, but as I have said previously, the answer to this challenge is to stop the boats coming

in the first place. That is why we all need to support the Illegal Migration Bill. Those who want more hotels would oppose it. The Labour party's policy will see more hotels, and the shadow Home Secretary will end up with more hotels to her name than Paris Hilton.

**Richard Fuller** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I do not know how to follow that, Mr Speaker.

All Members would like to see a reduction in the number of hotels used for asylum accommodation—I am sure that is true—but will the Minister spend a moment to congratulate the community of Sharnbrook, and in particular Rev. Paolo Di Leo and Councillor Doug McMurdo, on providing a welcoming environment for people who are put in such accommodation? I think there are signs across the country that communities do come together in these difficult circumstances to achieve an outcome that is beneficial for everyone.

**Robert Jenrick**: I would be very happy to put on record my view of the good work being done by my hon. Friend's constituents. He is right to say that there are voluntary and community groups, charities and churches right across the country that support asylum seekers while they are in this form of accommodation, and we and our providers facilitate that wherever possible.

### Topical Questions

T1. [905756] **Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman)**: I am going to make a short topical statement. The information that Meta and other tech companies give to UK law enforcement helps to protect around 1,200 children and leads to over 100 arrests of suspected child abusers every month. However, Meta plans to roll out end-to-end encryption soon, without safeguards, and it will no longer proactively detect and alert authorities to child grooming and abuse material on Facebook, Messenger and Instagram Direct. This will be a huge boon to anyone who wants to hurt a child. The Online Safety Bill will hold tech firms to account, but indifference to abuse is intolerable. I have written to Mark Zuckerberg—together with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), children's charities and campaign groups—to outline our profound concerns. Last week, I was in New Zealand at the Five Eyes security conference where there was widespread support for working together to ensure that social media companies put child safety first.

**Kelly Tolhurst**: Following recent knife crime incidents in my constituency and in the Medway towns, will my right hon. Friend meet me and our Kent police and crime commissioner, Matthew Scott, to discuss funding and how the Home Office can further support Kent police with the increased challenges we are facing in Kent due to our proximity to London?

**Suella Braverman**: I very much appreciate the particular challenges in Kent relating to knife crime. That is why I am glad that since 2019, Kent has received £5.5 million in core violence reduction unit grant funding, and £730,000

in additional support for targeted youth interventions. I have met the police and crime commissioner, and Chief Constable Tim Smith. They are both excellent at leading their forces, and there is now a record number of police officers in Kent. I am sure the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), will meet my right hon. Friend to discuss that issue. We have made a lot of progress, but we can do better.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary will be aware of the documentary last week on the relationship between Boris Johnson and others, and former KGB officer Alexander Lebedev, and about the meeting in an Italian villa, the ignoring of security advice on Lords appointments, and the decision not to sanction Alexander Lebedev. Given the importance of national security, will she tell the House whether she has any concerns about those reports? Will she set up an independent investigation into what happened, into who knew what, and into how far the security risk spreads?

**Suella Braverman**: At the Home Office, the Minister for Security and I take seriously the threats posed by hostile state actors. That is why the Minister for Security is chairing the Defending Democracy Taskforce, bringing together agencies and Departments in a cross-Whitehall approach to tackling the serious threats that we all face as parliamentarians and facing those in public office. I gently remind the right hon. Lady that one of her own parliamentary colleagues has a very dubious track record when it comes to working with the Chinese Communist party.

T2. [905758] **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that police funding reflects rurality and the huge uplift in population experienced in remote coastal locations during the summer tourist season?

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp)**: As I said in response to an earlier question, the Government intend to consult in due course on a new police funding formula, and part of that consultation will involve looking at the factors that should be taken into account. Those might include things such as population and crime levels, but things such as rurality, sparsity and seasonality, particularly seasonal tourism, are likely to form part of the new formula. I encourage Members across the House to engage closely with that consultation when it comes forward, to ensure that those factors are properly accounted for.

T5. [905761] **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. In recent weeks, the media have carried stories of patients who were receiving medical cannabis on private prescriptions, and who are now having their prescriptions paid for by the NHS. On the surface that is a great leap forward, but parents of children with intractable epilepsy who have been asking for such things for years are still being ignored. Will the Home Office consider reopening the 2018 licensing scheme to enable those children who are already being privately prescribed medical cannabis to have access to it via their NHS GP?

**Chris Philp:** Many cannabis base compounds were moved wholesale to schedule 2 a few years ago, enabling them to be prescribed. The question that the hon. Gentleman asked about NHS prescription is perfectly reasonable and fair, but prescriptions on the NHS are a matter for the Department of Health and Social Care and for the NHS, including the NHS in Scotland. I would be happy to pass on his inquiry to them.

T3. [905759] **Gordon Henderson** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): May I assure my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that the majority of my constituents in Sittingbourne and Sheppey understand that sending illegal migrants to Rwanda for processing is key to stopping small-boat crossings in the channel? Will she assure them that despite concerted opposition from the Labour party, she will deliver her plan?

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick):** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. We are disappointed by the judgment of the Court of Appeal, but we are determined to follow through. He is right to say that we have to add deterrence to the system, as it is only by breaking the business model of the people smugglers that we will stop the boats.

T7. [905763] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): My constituents want community policing. Kim McGuinness, the police and crime commissioner for Northumbria, has put in place a redeployment programme to get an extra 134 officers into neighbourhoods, but that will not make up for the 1,100 officers and the £148 million that we have lost due to budget cuts. And before the Minister mentions “plans”, that will still leave us 400 officers short. Why have the Tories failed so badly to get police officers on to the beat?

**Chris Philp:** As I mentioned in earlier answers, across England and Wales we now have record police numbers of 149,572. The previous peak was 146,030 in 2010, so we have 3,500 more officers than we have ever had before across England and Wales. In Northumbria, the number has gone up by 512 since 2015. Of course, many of the powers sit with the PCC, including powers over the precept. It is entirely open to police and crime commissioners to use those powers.

T4. [905760] **Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): Today, Operation Centurion has started across Lancashire, utilising £2 million from the Government to put more police officers on our streets tackling antisocial behaviour. In my constituency, that means almost 2,500 extra hours of police patrols in Padiham. It will have a major impact, but we can do more. Can I ask the Home Secretary whether the safer streets fund will have another round so that we can make physical changes, as well as getting more officers on the streets?

**Suella Braverman:** I am delighted with the progress being made to tackle antisocial behaviour in Burnley and Padiham. As my hon. Friend will know, we have allocated almost £1 million to roll out pilots of ASB hotspot response in 2023-24. A new round of safer streets will be announced soon. I take this opportunity to thank Lancashire police, which has launched an ASB problem-solving unit. It ran Operation Propulsion, which involved more officers patrolling locations dealing with motor nuisance and boy racers, and it has had a real good

crackdown on residential burglary thanks to Operation Defender. Neighbourhood crime has fallen by 26% in Lancashire. Tribute must be paid to Chief Constable Chris Rowley and the police and crime commissioner, Andrew Snowden.

T9. [905765] **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Given the exchanges earlier, I am obliged to ask the Home Secretary whether she understands the difference between using a cruise ship for the temporary accommodation of Ukrainian refugees, with a shared language and experience, and who have the right to work and are being actively relocated in the community, and using it essentially as a prison ship for the indefinite long-term detention of asylum seekers, who have no right to leave, no right to work, no right to benefits and no recourse to public funds. Does the Department appreciate the difference?

**Robert Jenrick:** I am disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He knows perfectly well that the proposition was not a prison ship. This is a ship that will be used in exactly the same way as the SNP Government did in Scotland, and in exactly the same way as the Belgian and the Dutch Governments are doing in their respective areas. If I may say, in Edinburgh today, there are 37 asylum seekers. That is disgraceful. If the SNP cared about this issue, it would step up, support asylum seekers and back our Bill.

**Anna Firth** (Southend West) (Con): People in Southend West want to see a tough, but just policy on illegal immigration that stops people unfairly jumping the queue, that stops evil people smugglers and above all stops vulnerable people drowning in the channel. Will my right hon. Friend therefore agree that we must continue to send a strong signal that it is this Government—not unelected lawyers or criminal gangs—who will decide who comes to this country?

**Robert Jenrick:** At the core of this question is: who decides who comes to this country? Is it for the Government and Parliament, or is it for people smugglers and human traffickers? Those of us on the Government Benches know exactly which side of the debate we are on; we want to stop the boats, and we want to secure our borders.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The family of my constituent who fled Sudan have been stuck in Egypt for more than two months awaiting a spousal visa. Four of the group of five have UK passports. Can the Minister tell us how long he would expect people to be waiting in this kind of situation when they have suffered such distress and anxiety?

**Robert Jenrick:** I would be happy to look into the case for the hon. Gentleman, but I can say to him that we are processing applications in third countries within service standards. We have closed the visa application centre in Khartoum for obvious reasons to protect the security of our staff and contractors, but we have teams in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and in other close countries who are there to support applicants, such as his constituents.

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Given this morning's U-turn by the Mayor of London on selling off Uxbridge police station, does the Minister believe that the Mayor should also act to save Barnet police station? If he does not, the Mayor's decision on Uxbridge looks like cynical political gameplaying and interference in a by-election.



**Chris Philp:** I and many other Londoners were concerned when, I think in 2017, Sadiq Khan announced plans to close 37 police stations. Thanks to the resolute campaigning of local councillor Steve Tuckwell in Hillingdon, Sadiq Khan has executed a last-minute handbrake U-turn under pressure, which I am sure is entirely unconnected with the upcoming by-election. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that if Sadiq Khan is to have any credibility at all with Londoners—he currently has pretty much none—he should reverse not just that one police station closure plan but all his police station closure plans.

**Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): Using the maximum police precept on council tax, having to tap into half a million pounds of reserves and yet again relying on grant funding shows that the Bedfordshire police and crime commissioner has failed to secure the long-term funding that our force desperately needs. Now he is off pursuing his personal ambitions as the next Tory candidate for Mid Beds. The review of police funding is welcome, but when will the House see it? Will it be before the summer recess?

**Chris Philp:** I cannot set out a precise timeframe—it is being actively worked on—but I point out that Festus, the police and crime commissioner for Bedfordshire, is doing a fantastic job for the people of that county. It is thanks to his active, energetic, persuasive and eloquent interventions that Bedfordshire has received these special grants. Its base budget has also gone up by £6.1 million this year thanks to his fantastic work.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Last week, Nigel Farage publicised the cancellation of his bank account under the politically exposed persons regulation, but he is only the latest of a number of people to have had their lives wrecked by that regulation. Recently, Lords in the other place tried to correct the policy, but with only partial success, because, I understand, of pushback from the Home Office and the security services. Will the Minister explain why that is and what he will do about it?

**The Minister for Security** (Tom Tugendhat): I am delighted to be asked a question. Yesterday, the Treasury and the Home Office came together and agreed various things that were announced in the House of Lords: the PEPs agreement. Such a closure on political grounds, if that is indeed what has happened—after all, we have only the allegation of it at this point—should, therefore, be completely unacceptable. PEPs is there to prevent the corrupt use of banking facilities by politicians in corrupt regimes. It is not there to silence individuals who may hold views with which we may or may not agree.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In the chief inspector of borders and immigration's latest report on the Home Office system to remove foreign national offenders, he said

“the Home Office does not have a firm grip on its caseworking operations”,

and

“This is no way to run a government department.”

He also said

“I found the Home Office's inability to provide reliable or consistent data and management information of particular concern.”

Given that, will the Minister explain how the Department will cope with the increase in casework, detention and removals planned under the Illegal Immigration (Offences) Bill?

**Robert Jenrick:** We take that report, as we do all others, very seriously. The right hon. Lady is right to say that there are lessons to be learned. However, returns are increasing as a result of deals such as the one we have done with Albania, as a result of reforms such as those we have made to the national referral mechanism and as a result of the 50% increase in illegal working visits that we have secured this year alone.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Despite repeated assurances from the Dispatch Box and it being nearly eight months since I first raised the issue with the Minister, the Home Office continues to operate two wholly inappropriate accommodation centres in my constituency, putting an unbearable strain on public services. Will my right hon. Friend expedite a clear timetable to close the centres permanently and restore the hotels to their intended purposes?

**Robert Jenrick:** My hon. Friend and I have discussed this on many occasions. She has doggedly campaigned for the closure of these centres as well as supported the steps that we are taking as a Government to stop the boats in the first place. I will be happy to have further conversations with her, but she has my assurance that we are working as fast as possible to clear all hotels, including those in her constituency.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Last week, the Government rejected a number of recommendations from the inquest into the tragic mass shooting in Plymouth in 2021, which has caused serious concern among some of the families of the victims. Will the Minister explain why he rejected the coroner's recommendations and whether all those on which he is consulting will be implemented by the end of this calendar year?

**Chris Philp:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for our meeting with the families a few weeks ago. As I said to him on the phone last week, whenever he and the families are ready to have further discussions with Home Office officials, they will be ready. The timing of that will be guided by the hon. Gentleman. On the substance of the Government's reply, we have committed to doing some things straight away. For example, the National Police Chiefs' Council has been funded to set up an accredited training programme for firearms officers—that was one of the recommendations. In due course that will become mandatory.

The inspectorate will conduct a thematic inspection of all firearms licensing next year. As I said to the House a few months ago, I asked it specifically to reinspect Devon and Cornwall's firearms licensing. It is doing that and it should report back by the end of July. The vast majority of the recommendations made by the coroner, the Independent Office for Police Conduct and the Scottish Affairs Committee in connection with the Isle of Skye shooting are being openly and neutrally consulted on.



The Government do not have a position; they will consult openly and respond once we have replies to the consultation. There were two recommendations that the hon. Gentleman referred to that the Government did not feel were appropriate, for the reasons set out in the document, but the vast majority are being openly consulted on. We have taken action on some of them already. I thank him again for his campaigning on this issue, which I know the families are grateful for.

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I recently visited Uxbridge police station to hear about the valuable work its officers do to serve my constituents as well as those in Uxbridge and South Ruislip. When the Mayor announced its closure in 2017, Hillingdon Council offered to buy the site at market rate and provide a £500,000 revenue contribution and leaseback arrangement, so that those valuable services could continue to be available. The Mayor said that that was completely impossible. Other than the relentless campaigning of Hillingdon Conservatives and Councillor Steve Tuckwell, could my right hon. Friend suggest any reason why the Mayor decided to keep it—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Simmonds, I think you need an Adjournment debate, not a topical question. See if you can pick the bones out of that, Minister.

**Chris Philp:** I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent question. The answer is no, I cannot think of anything other than the campaigning by Councillor Steve Tuckwell and others, which forced the Mayor into a last-minute, self-interested, screeching U-turn. I would like the Mayor to do a U-turn on all the other police stations he is threatening with closure.

**Mr Speaker:** You are going to be here a while yet.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Home Secretary concerned by recent revelations about the investigation into the Stephen Lawrence murder and what happened in the Brink's-Mat aftermath? Is she concerned about some of the out-of-work organisations that our police belong to?

**Suella Braverman:** The recent reports on the Stephen Lawrence case are an operational matter for the police, which I cannot get involved in, nor should I. That is a judgment for the police on operational and casework decisions, within which we do not interfere. We have a good track record on the Met turning around performance. Mark Rowley's turnaround plan and leadership efforts to restore confidence and rebuild trust with London are working. We need to back him to get the best results possible in London.

**Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con): There is a tweet going around regarding a man who identifies as a trans woman. The tweet reads that the trans-identified man who

“appeared in an @itvnews report about ‘mothers’ has posted an image ‘breastfeeding’ a baby. Do you think it’s ok to mock women like this?”

I think that is a valid question, but I am also extremely concerned for the welfare of the child. Will the Home Secretary's Department look into that for me, please?

**Suella Braverman:** While we respect all the rights of those in the trans community, it is clear that biological men cannot breastfeed. It is remarkable that we are in a position where the Labour party leader cannot define a woman. I think he said something like 99.9% of women do not have a penis. On that basis, we cannot rule him out from running to be Labour's first female Prime Minister.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): My constituent Sarah has been waiting more than six months for a biometric resident's permit, during which time she cannot work, access free healthcare or leave the country. Will someone do something to get her the status she deserves, so that she can go on with her life?

**Robert Jenrick:** I would be happy to look into the case for the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): The number of foreign national offenders eligible for deportation has now reached a record almost 12,000. Almost 4,000 of those left prison more than five years ago and even those volunteering for deportation are still here. Will the Minister get a grip on the deportation department within the Home Office and make sure those people are chucked out of our country?

**Robert Jenrick:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want those individuals to leave the country as swiftly as possible. The published figures show that FNO returns increased following the pandemic—by 14% in the latest 12-month period ending December 2022 compared with the previous 12-month period—but, quite clearly, there is more work to be done.

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): Liverpool is a city of sanctuary. Currently, we have 237 Afghan families who have been languishing in a hotel for two years. The council must rehouse the families by 11 August. Can the Minister say what will happen if we are unable to find suitable accommodation? Will they be made homeless and thrown out on the street?

**Robert Jenrick:** The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and I launched a programme that provides significant support to councils like Liverpool to help individuals find alternative accommodation. That might be in the private rental sector or it might be in social housing, but I think we can all agree on the principle that it is not right for individuals or families to live in hotel accommodation for over two years. We need to help those people out of the hotels this summer.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Immigration Minister's earlier claim will come as news to the Labour and Conservative coalition which runs North Lanarkshire Council and a surprise to a director of Mears who confirmed to me that North Lanarkshire Council houses not just asylum seekers but refugees. The Immigration Minister has now given factually wrong information to this House three times. When will he apologise to the House, and will he come back to it to give proper information?

**Robert Jenrick:** I do not think I have given factually wrong information. They may not be the facts the hon. Gentleman wants to hear, but they are the facts. I did

not mention North Lanarkshire, but there are six asylum seekers there. I think the hon. Gentleman would agree that there is more to be done.

## Road Fuel Prices

3.42 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on road fuel prices.

**The Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero (Graham Stuart)**: From rural hamlets to coastal communities, it is a properly functioning market that ensures fair prices for motorists, but for that market to function customers need transparent data to find the best price. On that basis, when we saw fuel prices rising last summer we asked the Competition and Markets Authority to investigate whether the market was working for customers as it should. Today, the CMA published its final market study report and I am shocked by its findings: rising fuel retail margins, and clear evidence of a rocket upwards and a feather downwards in the pricing pattern for diesel.

It is completely unacceptable that consumers have been paying more. The financial impact of the 6p per litre increase, just in the fuel margin, from 2019 to 2022, cost customers of the four supermarket fuel retailers £900 million last year alone. Asda's fuel margin target was three times higher for this year than in 2019 and Morrisons doubled over the same period. It is wrong that in a cost of living crisis drivers do not get a fair deal on fuel and end up being overcharged.

Motorists should not be used as cash cows by the fuel industry. The Government will not stand for it and I know this House will not stand for it. Therefore, we accept the CMA's recommendations in full. We will create a statutory open data scheme for retail fuel prices and an ongoing road fuel prices monitoring function for the UK market. We will consult on the design of the open data scheme and monitoring function as soon as possible this autumn, but that is not enough. I have asked the CMA to have a voluntary scheme up and running by next month and I fully expect fuel retailers to share accurate, up-to-date road fuel prices. The CMA will also continue to monitor fuel prices.

I demand that fuel retail bosses stop ripping off consumers, by making prices available so that the market can operate as it should. Transparency is vital for competition and to keep prices down.

**Tim Farron**: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero and am delighted to see him, but I am disappointed not to see the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I would have thought that this was something that he cared about.

The problem is that the Government have stood for this over the past year. This morning, right under the Government's nose, greedy petrol retailers imposed an additional cost of more than £900 million on people filling up their cars. Retailers swiftly passed on price increases in the wholesale market to drivers, and the prices rocketed. Yet when the wholesale prices dropped, prices were lowered only very slowly. I think we could all see that for ourselves. The RAC called this "nothing short of astounding in a cost-of-living crisis", which confirmed that "supermarkets haven't been treating drivers fairly at the pumps".

This affects not just the cost of driving. Higher road fuel prices have a knock-on effect on inflation across the economy, pushing up prices in every sector of our country.

The CMA makes it clear that rural areas still face the highest prices. Where supermarket pumps are fewer and further between, such as in Cumbria and Somerset, fuel retailers are likely to have costs that are higher still. The CMA found that fuel prices in rural places, such as my own in Westmorland and Lonsdale and in Somerton and Frome, are on average 1.2p per litre higher than those in urban areas. Of course, in rural communities with poor public transport links, people have no choice but to drive and the distances to travel are so much greater, affecting, in particular, people who work in the care sector. Once again, rural communities feel taken for granted by this Government.

One solution should be to expand the 5p per litre fuel duty relief scheme to those many isolated parts of Cumbria that are not currently covered by it, so that families in Cumbria are not left at the mercy of the most expensive fuel prices.

Why did the Government fail to stop greedy retailers hitting families with an almost £1 billion excess fuel bill in the first place? Will the Chancellor and the Prime Minister summon those company bosses to Downing Street and press them to return those unfair profits by lowering their prices? Will the Government expand the rural fuel duty relief scheme to more areas, to support communities such as mine that are struggling with the highest petrol prices?

**Graham Stuart**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He and the RAC are right to highlight the particular issue in rural communities such as those that he and, indeed, I represent, and the particular pressures on consumers there. He will understand that rural fuel duty relief is a matter for the Chancellor and that what we need is a properly functioning market. That is why we are implementing the findings of the CMA in full and putting in place an interim regime, starting next month.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the Chair of the Transport Committee.

**Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Towards the end of last year, the local radio station in Milton Keynes, MKFM, published research showing that, although there was considerable competition in Milton Keynes, petrol and diesel prices were substantially higher across the board than those in equivalent urban areas. I very much welcome the proposal for a real-time fuel price comparator, but will my right hon. Friend assure me that the Government will keep an eye on price differentials between different urban areas and intervene if necessary?

**Graham Stuart**: As ever, my hon. Friend champions his constituency in this House. I completely agree. That is why the monitoring function is so important in tandem with transparency. We have to make sure that people can see the prices. We know that consumers are prepared to travel but, if they do not know that there is a cheaper price available 2 or 3 miles down the road, they will not access it. That is something that we aim to put right.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the shadow Minister.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): People across Britain are facing the highest mortgage costs in Europe, the highest inflation among advanced economies, and the highest tax burden in 70 years. They are paying the price for 13 years of Conservative failure.

In that context, it is more important than ever for the Competition and Markets Authority to do all it can to help to bring down prices. Effective competition in the interests of consumers must be at the heart of our economy. That is why we firmly support the CMA's proposals to help to bring down the cost of fuel.

'Filling up the tank at supermarkets is an essential part of everyday life for families and small businesses across the country, so the fact that the average annual supermarket margins on fuel increased by 6p per litre between 2019 and 2022 is deeply worrying.

I am pleased to see that the Secretary of State has accepted the recommendations from the CMA to stop retailers artificially inflating petrol prices during a cost of living crisis; as he says, transparency is very important. However, given that the then Business Secretary wrote to fuel retailers and the CMA more than a year ago to highlight apparent unfairness in fuel prices, why has it taken so long for the Government to take action on this issue? Motorists did not need a report to tell them that they were being fleeced by fuel retailers; they see it every time they fill up at the pump. Why did the Government need to wait for the CMA to tell them what everyone else knew before they took action?

In Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council published a fuel price checker in September 2020, which has helped to keep fuel costs below those in England. Why have the Government taken almost three years to agree to do the same in England? Once again it is too little, too late from a Government, who have again sat on their hands. I note what the Minister said about an interim voluntary scheme and about consulting as soon as possible, but can he give a clear indication of when the Government will introduce the change in the law that is needed to make this permanent?

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Lady is right to highlight the cost of living crisis and the level of taxes. That, of course, is why her party getting into power would be such a disaster for ordinary consumers and motorists throughout the country. We have come through the pandemic and made sure we have kept the country afloat; for instance, the Government supported paying nearly half of everyone's energy bills through the last winter. A Labour Government would be a threat to markets such as this, which we need to function properly, not in the way they would under Labour.

As for why this has taken so long, the hon. Lady ought to know, having seen the disaster of her £28 billion energy borrowing package, which dematerialised: it was a great announcement, but it did not survive contact with reality.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think we need to help the Minister. The subject of the urgent question is road fuel prices and I think we should stick to that. I call the Chair of the Treasury Committee.

**Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): When the Chancellor announced that he was cutting fuel duty by 5p a litre, which cost the Exchequer billions of pounds, little did he expect that, as outlined so persuasively today by the CMA, it would feed through immediately into the profits of fuel retailers—although cynical British motorists may not be surprised, because they observed it themselves on a day-to-day basis. I welcome the steps that the Minister has announced, and urge him to act with greater speed in implementing them, but is he as surprised as I am that he has been asked this urgent question by the Liberal Democrats, who voted at their conference to hike fuel duty sharply?

**Graham Stuart:** I would like to say I was shocked or surprised, but I am not because—as everyone in the House knows, except the tiny number who sit on the Liberal Democrat Bench—hypocrisy is their main method of behaviour. The initial Government cut in fuel duty of 5p per litre represented savings for consumers worth about £2.4 billion. We on the Conservative Benches are on the side of the motorist. We are going to make sure that the market works and motorists are properly served by it.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Scottish National party spokesperson.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Minister says he will not stand for motorists' being ripped off, but that is exactly what Ministers have done. The Government have been complacent the whole time, following the 5p fuel duty cut.

Why has it taken the CMA so long to establish that motorists are being gouged by 6p per litre compared with 2019? It reported that diesel prices are an astonishing 13p per litre higher this year alone than they should have been. That is symptomatic of the "cost of greed" crisis. Asda received a fine for not complying with the CMA investigation. That shows an astonishing level of arrogance on the part of supermarkets that are ripping off their own customers. It is estimated that we are paying nearly £1 billion a year in additional fuel costs due to the lack of competition. How does imposing an initial fine of £30,000 on Asda work as a deterrent when it is making so much money?

I am all for an open data fuel finder scheme, but really, is that it? I already use an app to shop around for cheaper fuel prices, so this open data will not necessarily bring competition in all areas of the UK, and reliance on an app obviously will not help those who are digitally excluded. What are the Government's actual plans to ensure competition and reduced fuel prices, especially at motorway service stations, which are between 20p to 30p per litre more expensive? When will we see these fuel prices come down?

**Graham Stuart:** That is the closest I have ever seen the hon. Gentleman come to welcoming a Government response, so I shall take that with me. I do not mean to try your patience any more than I already do, Mr Speaker, but, as I said to the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), whether it is major energy packages or shipbuilding, we find that doing the work first leads to better long-term outcomes.



**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Given corporation tax, carbon taxes, the windfall tax, fuel duties and VAT, is not the bulk of the price at the pump, and of other fuels, now tax-based? Will my right hon. Friend remind us of how much is tax and urge the Chancellor to reduce some of those taxes to cut the cost of living?

**Graham Stuart:** I thank my right hon. Friend for championing the consumer, as he always does. As he will be well aware, tax is a matter for the Chancellor, but the whole House will have heard his passionate call to make sure that taxes are held down to the lowest amount they possibly can be. That is one more reason why we cannot have the Labour party taking control of the country.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese** (Slough) (Lab): In March, the RAC revealed that retailers are making a three times bigger margin on diesel than they were at the beginning of last year, and motorists are seeing absolutely no benefit from the Chancellor's fuel duty cut. Given the Government's dither and delay on taking any sort of action, how does the Minister feel when the Government's flagship policy to help motorists is having little to no impact?

**Graham Stuart:** We are furious that these price cuts have not been passed on to consumers. That is why we asked the CMA to investigate and to get further into the detail, and it is why we will implement its findings in full.

**Laura Farris** (Newbury) (Con): As my right hon. Friend is aware, I have been campaigning on the issue of fuel prices in west Berkshire for about a year and a half. One thing that has been particularly disappointing is the fact that fuel prices in every single neighbouring constituency are 5% to 8% lower. I wrote to the CMA and I am pretty disappointed to read its response today, which tells us a lot.

I welcome the introduction of a real-time fuel price comparator, but such a tool already exists, albeit in a slightly clunky form. I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that it is not enough just to tell people what the prices are at different pumps in their local area. It must be transparent to consumers whether they are in a general area that has higher or lower prices, so that their MP can make representations on what the supermarkets may be doing in that area and the CMA can intervene properly.

**Graham Stuart:** My hon. Friend has been assiduous and, as she has shown with her question, focused and detailed in trying to rectify a problem that the CMA has fully displayed today. It is an unusual way round, but I would be happy to meet her to discuss the matter further to make sure we put in place all the right elements, so that this transparency genuinely gets through to the consumer.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): There is no doubt that fuel costs are driving up inflation, especially in rural areas. I think the fuel price checker has had a dampening effect in Northern Ireland because the supermarkets are always aware that they are being looked on. However, does the Minister accept that his Government also have a responsibility? Net zero policies, with all their associated taxes—whether it is the emissions

trading scheme, green levies or fuel duties—drive up prices, too. The Government have a role to play in reducing inflation as well as in transparency on supermarket prices.

**Graham Stuart:** The right hon. Gentleman is drawing the wrong conclusion from the sky-high prices of the past year or two. It is sky-high international fossil fuel prices that caused the enormous squeeze. The faster we can move to cleaner and cheaper sources of energy, the sooner we can ensure that our constituents save money and contribute to dealing with what is an ever more serious threat.

**Mark Garnier** (Wyre Forest) (Con): Having brought a ten-minute rule motion on this subject some eight years ago, I am delighted that patience has finally paid off. One issue I was raising at that time was the inequality between the prices in towns and those on motorways, which the Scottish National party spokesman has mentioned. Is my right hon. Friend confident that the measures being brought in today will reduce those 15p or 20p premiums on road fuel prices at motorway service stations compared with normal areas?

**Graham Stuart:** As so often, my hon. Friend has been ahead of me. The issue he raises is part of the picture; like him, I have observed that the captive market along motorways is subject to higher prices than elsewhere. I hope that can be part of our consideration to make sure we have a system that works at its best for everybody.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): May I respectfully point out to the Minister that this is not a town versus country or urban versus rural issue? The RAC has identified that some retailers are grossly profiteering, taking a three times bigger margin than they were at the beginning of last year, particularly on diesel sales. For the avoidance of doubt, will he confirm that the Government scheme he has outlined today will apply to all fuel retailers, not just those at supermarkets?

**Graham Stuart:** I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the precise details of everybody who will be included. He is right to highlight that this is not just an issue in urban areas. However, in those areas there tends to be more competition and easier transparency than there can be in rural and coastal areas.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): A couple of weeks ago, I drew the House's attention to the fact that the same supermarket tanker would unload fuel at 10p a litre cheaper in one place than it would if it came 10 to 15 miles up the road to my constituency. If today's report does not fix that, it will not have been good enough and the Government will have more work to do. I hope that my right hon. Friend will give me some reassurance on that point.

**Graham Stuart:** We have to make sure the market works. Transparency is our biggest single weapon, and we need to be doing this in a way that reaches people, be they digitally enabled or not; we are wrestling with those details. Let us look at the alternative to a market-based system—other countries have tried it, as it is a populist measure. It does not work, it leads to a shortage of supply and it ends up creating the very dominance that we seek to ensure is not exploited in systems such as we have seen in this CMA report.

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) asked a good and apposite question. In February, I wrote to all the major supermarkets that have outlets in Chesterfield asking them why they were retailing petrol for 10p more a litre there than they were selling it for just 10 miles up the road in Sheffield. They were very transparent and honest about this, saying, “It’s a market where we think we can make more money out of Chesterfield residents than we do out of Sheffield residents. That’s why we charge you more.” That is despite the fact that there is no additional cost to getting the fuel there. Although I welcome the greater transparency, making it easier for consumers, what they will see in Chesterfield is that they are paying more than they would up the road in Sheffield. Is there anything in what the Minister is announcing today that will empower people in Chesterfield to bring their prices down?

**Graham Stuart:** Transparency.

**Chris Loder** (West Dorset) (Con): The good people of Bridport and Dorchester in West Dorset have had to pay up to 20p a litre more than those in towns not far away. The Liberal Democrats have been silent about that throughout the entire duration, so it is somewhat hypocritical of them to bring this matter to the House today, particularly given that they voted to increase the price per litre. Although I welcome what the CMA has had to say in its report today, it does not really deal with the issue we are seeing of rigorous yield management by supermarkets with their petrol prices. That is not a matter of competition; that is where they believe they can get more money out of a particular group people or community. I would be very pleased if the Minister would meet me to look at how we can take this forward and grasp that issue.

**Graham Stuart:** I would be delighted to do so.

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): Now that we know that competition on fuel prices has weakened in recent years and that that has led to inflated prices, particularly in my constituency where, despite a campaign for fair prices led by Stuart McMillan MSP, we have been paying over the odds for years, may I seek a guarantee that supermarket food prices are not following the same pattern?

**Graham Stuart:** Following this report, the CMA has decided to look into the supermarkets and will report back as soon as next month.

**Richard Fuller** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I thank the CMA for its report and the Government for accepting the recommendations, although I think we are putting too much faith in price transparency to solve the market problem. I was interested to see in the trend profit margins for supermarket retailers and non-supermarket retailers that supermarkets are consistently increasing their margins while non-supermarket retailers are not. Will the Minister follow up with retailers, in the light of this report, to make sure that we check that the margins come down next year and in the following year?

**Graham Stuart:** I thank my hon. Friend for his typically penetrating question. As I said, one of the recommendations is to maintain a monitoring function, which will help to give us the market intelligence so that if further intervention is required, we will have the data on which to base it.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Patchy public transport contributes to high costs for rural households, as many people have no choice but to use their cars for essential journeys. Despite this, the rural fuel duty relief scheme does not apply to a single area in Wales. Will the Minister commit to pressing the Treasury to reconsider the scheme to take into account access to local public transport networks, as well as providing a guarantee of inclusion for Welsh areas?

**Graham Stuart:** I thank the right hon. Lady for her question and will ensure that His Majesty’s Treasury is aware of it.

**Holly Mumby-Croft** (Scunthorpe) (Con): The good people of Scunthorpe spotted this issue some time ago, so I thank my right hon. Friend for his work on it and the measures he is recommending. Has the similar open-data scheme that has been trialled in Germany resulted in a boost in competitiveness? If so, when does my right hon. Friend think we will start to see the results at the pumps here?

**Graham Stuart:** I hope from as soon as next month, under a voluntary scheme. My hon. Friend gives me the perfect opportunity to repeat how determined I am to see the companies provide the data so that we have something far less clunky, as it has been called, and far more comprehensive than what we have today, and so that that can lead to the benefits that have been found elsewhere.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP): I am not certain that the seriousness of the situation that faces rural constituencies is being taken appropriately into account. My Angus constituents live in towns and landward areas that are miles away from supermarket fuels. They pay the highest prices for fuel, they have no public transport to speak of so have to use their cars and vehicles, they pay the highest delivery prices and they are often on the lowest wages. If the Minister thinks that greater transparency over fuel prices is going to help, he is stretching the point. My constituents in Angus know how expensive their fuel is and they know how far they have to travel to get cheaper fuel. This announcement will not fix the situation. We need the Treasury to get its act together and intervene in what is essentially critical national infrastructure, which is what road fuel is.

**Graham Stuart:** I will take that as a further representation to His Majesty’s Treasury.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Motorists in and around Kettering have long suspected that petrol and diesel forecourt retailers have been inflating prices well above where they should be. Prices go up far too quickly and come down far too slowly. Given the fact that the petrol and diesel forecourt retailers effectively ignored the letter from the Business Secretary in May 2022, will the Minister assure my constituents that the Competition and Markets Authority will continue to monitor the market closely to ensure that does not happen again?

**Graham Stuart:** My hon. Friend is quite right. Urging them to behave properly is not enough, which is why we will not only put in place a mandatory system to ensure that the data is there but ensure ongoing monitoring so that, as I said to our hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller), we have the data on which to base further intervention should that be required.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): This is a very welcome announcement, especially in respect of the information on fuel-price competition that will allow drivers to look for fuel at petrol stations that are closer and have better prices, thereby enabling them to save money. On any potential fuel fund offers, there is an older generation—I am probably one of them—who perhaps do not use apps and therefore do not understand how they work; what steps will the Minister take to ensure that they have access to information on fuel funding that is accessible for them and easily understood so that they, too, can take advantage of what is on offer?

**Graham Stuart:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I would not want to finish without mentioning that, as of Monday 26 June, unleaded petrol is 143.43p per litre, and that has reduced, on average, by 47.5p from June last year, and diesel is 145.6p per litre, and that has reduced by 53.3p per litre on the previous year. I will write to the hon. Gentleman to make sure that I can properly inform him in answer to his question.

**Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): This report clearly shows that residents in Burnley and Padiham and our villages have been overcharged for their fuel for too long. Does my right hon. Friend think that the Competition and Markets Authority now needs to relook at the ownership changes at Asda?

**Graham Stuart:** As the Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, that perhaps stretches slightly beyond my brief, but, as those on Treasury Bench will have heard my hon. Friend's question, I am sure that he will be able follow up with others who have direct responsibility.

## NHS Long-term Workforce Plan

**Mr Speaker:** I wish to thank the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care for coming to the Chamber to make his statement. It is a pity that the Prime Minister did not do so on Friday when the world heard what he had to say before we did. The Prime Minister is a Member of Parliament. He is answerable to the Members of Parliament from all political parties. I have to say that his behaviour was not acceptable. He may be the Prime Minister, but the Members of Parliament should hear first. I am very pleased that the Secretary of State is doing it the right way.

4.11 pm

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay):** The Government note the comments that you have made from the Chair, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I would love them to take what I have said on board.

**Steve Barclay:** That is also noted, Mr Speaker.

May I, on behalf of the Government, note the passing of the former head of the civil service, Lord Kerslake? He had a distinguished career in public service, including as chief executive of Sheffield Council and chair of King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, as well as being head of the civil service. We send our condolences to his family and friends both in Whitehall and across the civil service.

With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on our long-term workforce plan for the NHS.

This week marks the 75th birthday of the NHS. We should celebrate its achievements, its founding principles and its people. From doctors and dentists to pharmacists and physios, NHS staff devote their lives to caring for others. I am sure the whole House would agree that the NHS holds a special place in our country due to the care offered by the people who work for it.

It is said that, in 1948, the NHS had fewer than 150,000 staff and a budget of around £11 billion. Today, the NHS employs closer to 1.4 million people with a budget of more than £160 billion. The transformation of the care offered by the NHS through advances in medicine is reflected in the fact that people now live 13 years longer than on average in 1948.

Today, alongside the increase in the number of staff, the range of treatments and the improved patient outcomes, demand on the NHS has also increased. People live longer, they live with more complex medical conditions, and we are also dealing with the challenges left behind by a once-in-a-generation pandemic.

One in four adults lives with two or more health conditions. Although our population is forecast to grow by around 4% over the next 15 years, the number of those over 85 is forecast to grow by more than 50%. In addressing the challenges both of today and of the longer term, it is right that we have a recovery plan focused on the immediate steps as we rebuild from the pandemic, and longer-term plans to ensure that the NHS is sustainable for the future. This will ensure that the NHS is there for future generations in the way that it has been for us and our families over the past 75 years.



[Steve Barclay]

We have already set out detailed recovery plans to reduce long waits for operations, improve access to urgent and emergency care and make it easier to see GPs and specialists in primary care. On electives, we have virtually eliminated the two-year wait, which we did this summer, and cleared more than 90% of 80-week waits from their peak at the end of March—in marked contrast to the much longer waits we see in Wales, where the NHS is run by Labour.

On urgent and emergency care, we are investing £1 billion in 5,000 additional permanent beds, alongside expanding virtual wards to improve discharge from hospital and investing in community services to prevent admissions, especially for the frail and elderly. On primary care, we are investing more than £600 million, including in improving technology to address the 8 am rush. We have already exceeded our manifesto target by 3,000, with 29,000 additional roles in primary care to enable patients to access specialists more quickly, and we are reducing burdens on GP surgeries through the development of the NHS app and improving the range of services offered through Pharmacy First, enabling pharmacists to prescribe drug treatments for seven minor illnesses.

Alongside the recovery plans, we are taking action to improve prevention through early diagnosis of conditions, whether through the 108 community diagnostic centres that are already open, or the 43 new and expanded surgical hubs planned for this year. Our national roll-out of our lung cancer screening programme has helped to transform patient outcomes, turning on its head the previous position where 80% of lung cancers in our most deprived communities were detected late, with 76% now being detected early.

Alongside the immediate measures we are taking to deal with demand in the NHS, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary we are also investing in the NHS to make sure it is sustainable for the future. Last month, I announced to the House the largest-ever investment in the NHS estate, with more than £20 billion committed to our new hospitals programme.

Today I can confirm to the House that, for the first time in the NHS's history, the Government have committed to publishing a long-term workforce plan, setting out the largest-ever workforce training expansion in the NHS's history, backed by £2.4 billion of new funding. The plan responds to requests from NHS leaders and has been developed by NHS England. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Amanda Pritchard, the chief executive of NHS England and her team, Gavin Lerner and colleagues within the Department of Health and Social Care, and the more than 60 NHS organisations that have engaged closely in the plan's development, including many of our Royal Colleges.

The plan sets out three priorities: to train more staff, to retain and develop the staff already working for the NHS and to reform how training is delivered, taking on board the best of international practice. Let me deal with each in turn. We will double the number of medical school places, increase the availability of GPs being trained by 50%, train 24,000 more nurses and midwives and increase the number of dentists by 40%.

When it comes to improving retention, we recognise the importance of flexible working opportunities, especially for those approaching retirement. The plan will build

on proposals in the NHS people plan and build on steps already taken by the Chancellor at the spring Budget on pension tax reform.

In respect of reform, the plan sets out policies to expand the number of associate roles, which provide greater career progression for existing staff and in turn reduce the workload of senior clinicians, allowing them to focus on the work that only they can do. Both measures will improve productivity by enabling more staff to operate at the top of their licence. A constant theme across the long-term workforce plan is our focus on apprenticeships and vocational training, including a commitment to increasing the number of staff coming through apprenticeships from 7% today to 22% by 2031-32. That reflects the strong commitment of the Secretary of State for Education and myself to facilitate greater career progression through apprenticeships. It will also help to recruit and retain staff in parts of the country that often find it harder to recruit.

In the week in which we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the NHS, today's announcement confirms the Government's commitment to the first ever comprehensive NHS long-term workforce plan. The plan sets out detailed proposals to train more staff, offers greater flexibility and opportunity to existing staff, and embraces innovation by reforming how education and training are delivered across the NHS. The plan will be iterative; we will return to it every couple of years to enable progress to reflect advances in technology such as artificial intelligence so that the numbers trained can be best aligned with patient services. It also reflects a growing need for more general skills in the NHS, as patients with more than one condition require a more holistic approach.

The NHS long-term plan, backed by £2.4 billion of new funding, comes in addition to our record investment in the NHS estate. It ensures that we put in place the funding required for a sustainable future for the NHS, alongside the steps that we are taking in the immediate term to reduce waiting lists and ensure that the NHS is there for patients. As the chief executive of NHS England has said herself, the long-term workforce plan is a truly historic moment for the NHS. As such, I commend this statement to the House.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

4.21 pm

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): I thank the Health Secretary for advance sight of his statement. I say "statement", but what I really mean is "admission"—an admission that, after 13 long years, the Conservatives have run out of road, run out of ideas, and turned to Labour to clear up the mess that they have made. Make no mistake: at its heart, this is Labour's workforce plan. It is a plan that we have called for since last September; a plan that we have begged the Government to adopt again and again. They say that imitation is sincerest form of flattery, and I, for one, am relieved that the Government have finally seen sense, but the question that the Health Secretary and Conservative Members need to answer today is: what on earth took them so long?

This week, the NHS celebrates its 75th anniversary as it faces the biggest crisis in its history—a crisis that has been building for years under this Government: a staff shortage of 154,000, 7.4 million patients stuck waiting for treatment, people across the country finding it virtually



impossible to see a GP, and families desperately worried that if they need an emergency ambulance, it just will not arrive on time. Ministers constantly blame covid for those problems, but the truth is that waiting list numbers were rising and staff shortages increasing long before the pandemic struck.

Patients now want to know when they will finally see a difference. Can the Health Secretary confirm that, under his proposals, the NHS will not have the staff that it needs for at least eight years? Does he now regret the cut in medical school places that his Government brought in in 2013? Does he regret the decision taken last summer to cut the number of medical school places by 3,000 just when the NHS needed them most?

The Health Secretary claims that this is the first long-term NHS workforce plan, but let me set the record straight. In 2000, the last Labour Government produced a 10-year plan of investment and reform—a plan that delivered not only 44,000 more doctors and 75,000 more nurses, but the lowest-ever waiting times and the highest-ever patient satisfaction in the history of the NHS. That was a golden inheritance that Conservative Members can only dream of and that they have squandered through a decade of inaction and incompetence.

Let me turn briefly to what is missing from the proposals. Without a serious strategy to keep staff working in the NHS, Ministers will be forever running to catch up with themselves. Yet the Secretary of State has completely failed to put forward a proper plan to end the crippling strikes that are having such a huge impact on patient care. Six hundred and fifty thousand operations and appointments have been cancelled because of industrial action. Next week, junior doctors will walk out for five days, followed by two days of consultants' strikes. After seven months of disruption, can the Health Secretary tell us when he and the Prime Minister will finally do their job, sit down and negotiate with staff, and bring an end to this Tory chaos?

The one part of Labour's workforce plan that Ministers have not stolen is our plan to fund it by scrapping the non-dom tax status. In fact, when the Health Secretary was touring the media studios yesterday, he was asked nine times how he was going to pay for the plan and he completely failed to answer. He has had a little more time to prepare, so I am going to try again. Will he fund it through higher taxes, when we already have the highest tax burden for 70 years, or will he fund it through higher borrowing, when our nation's debt is at record levels? Labour will introduce plans only when we can show how they will be paid for, because that is what taxpayers deserve. It is high time that Conservatives did the same.

From the windfall tax to help for mortgage holders to a proper plan for the NHS workforce, where Labour leads, the Conservatives only follow. This tired, discredited Government have had their day. The public know that it is time for change, and in their hearts Government Members too know that it is time for change. It is time for them to move aside and let Labour finally deliver.

**Steve Barclay:** Well, that really was a confused response. The hon. Lady began with reference to Labour's proposals and the claim that our plan followed them. I took the precaution of bringing Labour's announcement with me to the Chamber. Members can look at it in their own time, but it does not use the word "reform" once,

despite the fact that "Train, retain, reform" is a key part of our proposals. Proposals for reform include moving from five-year to four-year medical undergraduate training; the expansion of roles such as physician associate; a significant expansion in the use of apprenticeships; and flexibility for retiring consultants, so that they can return to roles in, for example, out-patient services. A wide range of reforms came about as a result of the consultation with 60 different NHS organisations and are a key feature of the plan, but in Labour's proposals reform is not mentioned once.

In addition, Labour's proposals are for a 10-year period. Our plan covers 15 years. Its proposal covered 23,000 additional health roles; our proposal deals with 50,000. I could go on and talk about the fact that the Labour proposal does not even mention GP trainees. Labour Members keep coming to the House and saying that primary care is important, but their proposals did not even touch on the workforce with regard to GPs. They did not even mention pharmacists, even though, as part of a primary care recovery plan, a key chunk of our proposal is Pharmacy First. It is extremely important that we can deliver services to patients in innovative ways. The ultimate irony is that the shadow Health Secretary, in one of his many interviews, including interviews to promote his book, said that the NHS "must reform or die". He said that it must reform, yet Labour's proposals do not mention reform at all.

Labour welcomes the plan, but it goes on to say that it will take too long to implement, while claiming that it is its plan, which, again, points to the confusion among Labour Members. Let me remind the House of what has been done. We had a manifesto commitment for 50,000 additional nurses—we are on track to deliver that, with 44,000 in place. We had a manifesto commitment to have 26,000 additional roles in primary care, and we have met that, with 29,000 roles in place. In 2018, we made a commitment to five new medical schools in parts of the country where it is hard to recruit. We have delivered that—a 25% expansion in the number of medical students, who will come on stream in hospitals next summer. However, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the NHS, it is right that we also look beyond that to the longer-term needs of the NHS. That is exactly what the plan does with its doubling of medical places, but alongside that, it innovates by embracing things like a medical apprenticeship so that we can look at different ways of delivering training.

The hon. Lady talked about strikes, which is a further area of confusion on the Labour Benches. Labour Members say that they do not support a 35% pay rise for junior doctors, on the grounds that the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), says that they should not. Either Labour Members want to support the junior doctors, or they do not—once again, their position seems confused.

I will finish with one final area of confusion on the Labour Benches. The hon. Lady talked about the elastic non-dom revenue raiser, despite the fact that the former shadow Chancellor, Ed Balls, has said that it would not raise the funds that are claimed. He has said that it would do quite the opposite: it would deter investment in the UK. In addition, Labour has already spent those funds on a range of measures, such as the breakfast clubs that Labour Members come to the House and

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talk about. The reality is that it would not fund Labour's proposals, whereas we have made a commitment to back our plan with £2.4 billion of funding from the Treasury.

This is a historic moment as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the NHS. It is a long-term commitment from a Government who are backing the NHS through the biggest investment in the NHS estate—over £20 billion—and a series of recovery programmes, expanding our diagnostic capacity and our surgical hubs. That is why the workforce plan is truly innovative. It does not just train more staff or offer opportunities to retain more staff; it reforms as well—something that is sadly lacking in Labour's proposals.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Select Committee.

**Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): This is a serious piece of work, and it is very welcome. Despite calls from people like me to get on with it, it was right for the Government to take their time and get it right. The Select Committee will scrutinise it—as we do—on 12 July.

The training piece is very strong. Doubling the number of medical school places has to be right, and I am glad that the Secretary of State thought of it. On retention, if we are saying—rightly, I would contest—that it is not all about pay, what role does he envisage the integrated care systems and, therefore, the trusts having in supporting staff as he makes the “one workforce” that is mentioned in section 5, with which I agree, come to pass?

**Steve Barclay:** Characteristically, my hon. Friend the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee makes an extremely pertinent point about the role of the ICSs. As we move to place-based commissioning and look to integrate more, the interplay between the workforces in the NHS and in social care will be a key area where the ICSs will be extremely important.

The ICSs will have a particular role in the apprenticeship and vocational training, which are key retention tools in those parts of the country where it is hard to recruit, as well as in offering more flexibility to staff. When I talk to NHS staff, they often talk about having different needs at different stages of their career—whether for childcare commitments, which relate to the measures the Chancellor set out in the Budget, caring for an elderly relative, or wanting to retire and work in more flexible ways—and the ICSs have a key role to play in that. I welcome my hon. Friend's comment that this is a serious and complex piece of work, and that it was right that we took our time to get it correct.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Despite the significant desert of dentists, I note from the plan that we will not see an increase in dental training places next year, the year after or the year after that, meaning that we will not see more dentists for nearly another decade. We have a crisis now, so what is the Secretary of State going to do about it?

**Steve Barclay:** We are already seeing a fifth more work than last year, due to the flexibilities that the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien)

announced, including the ability for dentists to take on more work within their commission and the changes to the units of dental activity pricing to better reflect more complex work. Of course, we have 6.5% more dentists than in 2010, but we also recognise that within the £3 billion budget, we want to go further. That is why we are looking at proposals to go further than the measures announced, but progress is being made, with a fifth more activity than last year.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): I welcome the workforce plan and applaud NHS England's ambition. However, for the plan to be successful, it is vital that we promote career options that often go unseen. I therefore urge my right hon. Friend to work with the Education Secretary and NHS England to ensure that young people are better informed about the myriad opportunities in the allied health professions and as healthcare scientists before choosing GCSE, A-level or university options.

**Steve Barclay:** My hon. Friend raises a brilliant point. I do not know if Members know, but there are 350 different types of role in the NHS. It is really important that we get the right information to children whose parents are perhaps not informed about those opportunities. One point on which I slightly take issue with my hon. Friend is that it is not just those at the start of their career who need to be aware of the opportunities. This is about offering opportunities to people throughout their careers to progress and to take on more advanced roles. I strongly believe that we should not define people's future career by where they are at 21 or 22; they should have the opportunity to progress. That is a key part of the workforce plan, and I think it is a key Conservative principle that they have that ladder of opportunity throughout their time in the NHS.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): I associate myself with the remarks the Secretary of State made about Bob Kerslake. He was a true public servant, and his death is our loss.

What is the point of a workforce plan if the Secretary of State is not actually talking to the workforce? When will he talk to the junior doctors and the consultants? Can I also ask whether the work on the workforce plan will start forthwith or sometime in the future?

**Steve Barclay:** The fact that we are talking to the workforce is shown by the fact that we have reached agreement with the largest workforce group in the NHS.

**Valerie Vaz** indicated dissent.

**Steve Barclay:** The right hon. Lady, for whom I have a huge amount of respect, is shaking her head, but it is a fact that the largest workforce group in the NHS are those on “Agenda for Change”, which covers more than 1 million healthcare workers from nurses, midwives and paramedics through to porters, cleaners and many others. We have reached agreement with the NHS Staff Council, and those sums—the 5%, plus the lump sum in recognition of their tremendous work—is going into pay packets this month. So we have reached agreement, notwithstanding discussions with the junior doctors. They still demand 35%, and that is not affordable.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I welcome this long-term plan, particularly its recognition that the skillsets required in the NHS over the next 10 or 15 years, with the requirement for multidisciplinary working and generalised clinical skills, are going to change. Does my right hon. Friend agree that two things are needed for implementation? One is to improve the sense of culture in the NHS, which could lead to better retention. The second element is to ensure that digital innovation, particularly the use of artificial intelligence to improve clinical skills and other skills, is rolled out more generally in the NHS. We need to diffuse that innovation a lot more to support the critical new skillsets that are required for a modern health service.

**Steve Barclay:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. As a former Health Minister, he knows these issues extremely well. There is a requirement—this is something the chief medical officer, Professor Sir Chris Whitty, has spoken about—for more generalist skills in the NHS, not least given that one in four adults now has two or more health conditions. We need flexibility to respond to changes not just in technology, but in service design, which will evolve as well.

My hon. Friend is also right about the wider issues of culture. I think the whole House was concerned about recent reports of sexual assaults linked to the NHS. One of the key features of the agreement we have reached with the NHS Staff Council is to work more in partnership on violence against members of NHS staff. I know there will be consensus in the House that that is unacceptable, so we are working with trade union colleagues on how we tackle it. Again, with racism, we still have too many cases of concern. There are a number of areas of culture that we are working constructively with trade union colleagues and others to address.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his comments about Bob Kerslake, whose spell in public service included his time as chief executive of Sheffield City Council. He continued to have many roles in the city, where he will be much missed.

After this Government's 13 years in charge, morale in the NHS is clearly at rock bottom, with the value of pay falling, pressures increasing and a record number of staff—almost 170,000—leaving the NHS last year. The CEO of NHS Providers said that that must be reversed, but all the Secretary of State talks about is a little bit of working flexibility. Does he recognise that he has to address the crisis in morale to stem the tide of people leaving the NHS?

**Steve Barclay:** It is simply not correct to say that this is simply about flexibility—for example, look at the very significant changes made on pension tax. That was the No.1 demand of the British Medical Association consultants committee, and the Government agreed to it. A significant amount of work is going on. The NHS people plan talked about not just flexibility but some of the cultural points that are important. Some roles that have been introduced need to expand, such as some of the advanced positions like advanced clinical nurse or physician associate, where there are opportunities for people to progress their careers. It is worth pointing out that, once again, not a single Welsh Labour MP has turned up to defend their party's record in Wales. As we

set out a long-term workforce plan, we are setting out that ambition for England, but we see very little from the Labour party in Wales.

**Damian Green** (Ashford) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on this welcome announcement. I was happy to join his celebration of the 75th anniversary in the most practical way by visiting the new children's emergency department at the William Harvey Hospital in my constituency. It is opening for patients this week and will be extremely welcome. He will be aware that some of the problems of the NHS can be solved only if we solve problems in the social care system as well. I urge him to follow up this extremely useful and welcome workforce plan for NHS workers with a similar idea for the social care system, because unless we fix one, we will not fix the other.

**Steve Barclay:** My right hon. Friend makes a valid point about the integration between health and social care, and that was a flagship part of the reforms in 2022, which brought the NHS and social care together through the integrated care system. I join him in welcoming the news about William Harvey Hospital, which is extremely important to the local area. On social care more widely, we must also be cognisant of the differences. The NHS and social care employ roughly similar numbers at around 1.5 million people, but one is one employer and the other is 15,000 employers, so the dynamics between the two are different. The prioritisation of that integration is exactly right. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced up to £7.5 billion for social care in the autumn statement, recognising that what happens in social care has a big impact on discharge in hospitals and hospital flow, which in turn impacts on ambulance handovers.

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): After promises of new hospitals that have not got off the ground and 6,000 more GPs that never came to pass, it is fair to say that the British public will judge the Government on their actions not their words. Let me press the Secretary of State further on social care. He will remember that at the start of this year, people were dying in the back of ambulances and in hospital corridors, in part because people could not be discharged from hospitals into social care. If the Government believe, as I do, that we cannot fix the NHS if we do not fix social care, will he also bring forward a workforce plan for our social care sector?

**Steve Barclay:** That repeats the previous question, so I will not repeat the answer. It is slightly ironic to call for a plan for a new hospital programme and for a long-term workforce plan, and then criticise us when we deliver on both of those, as we have done with more than £20 billion of investment in the new hospitals programme, which we announced last month, £2.4 billion in the first ever long-term workforce plan and the biggest ever expansion of workforce training in the history of the NHS. Of course we need to take action in the short term to deal with the consequences of the pandemic. That is what our recovery plan does. The urgent emergency care plan that I announced in January takes specific action on demand management in the community. There are measures upstream on boosting capacity in emergency departments and downstream on things such as virtual wards. A huge amount of work is going on. We are putting more



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than £1 billion into 5,000 more permanent beds to get more bed capacity into hospitals. On social care, in the autumn statement the Chancellor committed up to £7.5 billion of further investment over two years, and it was part of our reforms to better integrate health and social care.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I welcome the NHS long-term workforce plan and in particular its emphasis on training, retention and reform. At the moment, about a quarter of NHS staff are recruited from abroad. Can the Secretary of State confirm to the House and my constituents that this plan enables the development of a strong pool of homegrown talent, so that we can reduce foreign recruitment more towards 10%, which would be a lot more sustainable for the long-term future of the NHS?

**Steve Barclay:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As we boost our domestic workforce training, there will be scope to reduce the number recruited internationally. From 1948 onwards, international recruitment has always played an important role in the NHS, and we are hugely grateful for the service offered by those recruited internationally, but we also recognise that as demography changes in other countries, there will be increasing competition for healthcare workers around the world, so it is right that we boost our domestic supply. That is what this plan does, and it is why this is a historic moment for the NHS in making that long-term commitment that will in turn reduce the demand on the international workforce.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): I, too, add my condolences to the family of Bob Kerslake, who did excellent work in my borough tackling poverty. I would congratulate the Secretary of State on this announcement if it did not come 13 years into a Conservative Government. It is a bit like Bobby Ewing coming out of the shower, the way the Secretary of State is saying, "I've just realised there's a crisis in the NHS." We went into covid with 2.4 million people on waiting lists, which was a record. It is now up to 7.4 million. The report itself says that we have 154,000 fewer staff than we need today in the NHS. After 13 years in government, if the Tories really cared about the NHS, it would not be in the state it is in, would it?

**Steve Barclay:** The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that since 2010, there has been a 25% increase in the NHS workforce. More than a quarter of a million more people now work in the NHS than was the case in 2010. There is a 50% increase in the number of consultants working in the NHS today compared with 2010, but the reality is that demand has increased as a result of an older population, advances in medicine and in particular the demands of the pandemic, and that is what we are responding to. We are also taking measures in parallel. We are on track to deliver our manifesto commitment for 50,000 more nurses, with 44,000 now in place. We also have beaten our manifesto target on primary care, with 29,000 additional roles in place. That means that people can get to the specialist they need, which in turn frees up GPs for those things that only GPs can do and ensures that patients can access care much more quickly.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): According to the King's Fund, the proportion of GDP taken by the NHS has increased in the past 50 years from 3.4% to 8.2%. On the same trajectory, in 50 years' time, it will take a fifth of all our GDP. That is totally unsustainable, especially as someone's only right, despite the fact they are paying ever increasing amounts of tax, is to join the back of the queue. I ask again: will the Secretary of State launch a study—and, if necessary, appoint a royal commission—on fundamental reform of the whole nature and funding of our health system, so that we can learn from every other developed country, such as Australia, France, Italy and Germany, where they unleash private sector investment into healthcare and give people rights to their healthcare, while ensuring that those who need it get free healthcare at the point of delivery?

**Steve Barclay:** I hope my right hon. Friend is pleased to see the measures we are taking with the Lord O'Shaughnessy review on clinical research trials to make it easier and faster to do research in the NHS. That in turn attracts private investment to the NHS. He will have seen the announcement I made on Tuesday of £96 million for 93 different research projects, such as at Great Ormond Street Hospital, where we have allocated £3.5 million for research into rare conditions in children. That translates into research that is then deployed, usually in adults. We are investing there, and we are screening 100,000 children through Genomics England. We have got a deal with Moderna and BioNTech so that we can have bespoke cancer vaccines. On Monday, we rolled out national lung cancer screening. Previously, in our most deprived communities we were detecting lung cancer late—80% were diagnosed late—but in those pilots we turned that on its head with 76% detected earlier.

I know that my right hon. Friend, as a former Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, will agree that by detecting earlier, not only are patient outcomes far better but treatment is far cheaper, whether that is for lung cancer or through our innovation on HIV screening in emergency departments picking up HIV in people who do not realise that they have it. When we treat it early, the patient outcomes are better, and it is fiscally much more sustainable. That is how we will address some of his concerns.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State could do something now—not in eight years' time—to relieve the pressure on our NHS, and it has nothing to do with pension funds. Figures from the Royal College of General Practitioners show that 53% of GPs think they cannot work in a flexible way to balance family and work commitments. It is little wonder that GPs aged 35 to 44 are the biggest group on the retention scheme who are leaving the profession—it does not take a rocket scientist to work out that it is the mums.

When I asked the Secretary of State's Department what he was doing to monitor flexible working and whether we are getting roles that people can do—not just sitting with their 16 hours but finding ways to work and balance family—it said that it did not monitor the situation. It was not even looking at it. We are losing brilliant staff and wasting billions of pounds, and we will have a delay before our constituents see the benefit of any workforce plan unless that changes. I have listened to him and looked at the statement that does not make a single mention of childcare, although he did refer to it



in passing. What will he actually do not just for retirees but for doctors with families to get them back into the NHS so that we can all benefit?

**Steve Barclay:** I think there is actually a lot of agreement between the hon. Lady and I. She talked about the plan, and having read it a number of times—that is part of my role—I know that childcare is specifically referred to in the summary, no less, in terms of the key issues that it goes on to set out. It goes into detail about our proposals, including linking up to the NHS people plan and greater flexibility in terms of roles and people retiring. One aspect of the NHS Staff Council deal is the expansion of pension abatement rules. So there is a huge amount.

The hon. Lady calls for more flexibility. I set out a number of the areas, and she does not seem to realise that there are three sections to the plan, with the second being all about giving greater flexibility to help retain our staff. So the plan addresses the points she raises; that just does not seem to be the answer she wants to hear. As for flexibility being important to mums, yes it is, and the NHS has a largely female workforce, but it is also important to dads. It is important to all NHS staff that we have that flexibility.

**Richard Fuller** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): The NHS today, at 1.4 million employees, is the fifth-largest employer in the world, and if the ambitions in this welcome plan are met, it will be the largest employer in the world. That raises the question of how effective the management of those human resources is. It is a little disappointing that there is so little commentary in the plan on two important management issues: the ambitions on improving the quality of management systems, and particularly clarification of decision rights and responsibilities; and the quality of accounting control systems and how the NHS seeks to improve them. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the NHS looks at those two important matters?

**Steve Barclay:** Those are both fair points. I know that my hon. Friend comes at this with great commercial experience, and I hope he knows that I have an interest in those issues. Just to reassure him, the plan is iterative; it is not a one-off. It is a framework from which we will do further work. Indeed, one of the areas that I am often criticised for is my interest in data and variation in data across the NHS—he and I probably agree on that more than some of those who are critical. That speaks to his point—the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee's point relates to this—that in a system the size of the NHS, data on the performance of the integrated care boards and their role in terms of the workforce is one area that the House will want to return to.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese** (Slough) (Lab): We know a Government are out of ideas when they copy the Opposition's plan to train the doctors and nurses that the NHS so desperately needs. The majority of those policies will not be implemented until after the general election—long after the British public have booted the Conservatives out of power because of their industrial-scale incompetence, which included crashing the economy.

The Secretary of State will be aware that the NHS is short of more than 150,000 staff right now. Will he take responsibility for those shortages and admit that, had the Government acted more than a decade ago, the NHS would have the staff that it needs right now?

**Steve Barclay:** All I can say is that the hon. Gentleman clearly has not read the plan. If he had, he would have seen that it is developed by NHS England. That the Labour party is claiming authorship of it is slightly odd. As I pointed out in response to the shadow Health Minister, the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), Labour's plan fails to mention reform at all, or GP training or physios. Our plan is 15 years, Labour's is 10; it is a fraction of the size and it is flawed in many other ways. This plan has been developed by NHS England with contributions from 60 different organisations across the NHS. That is why it has been so widely welcomed by many in the NHS, who have called for it for some time.

**Holly Mumby-Croft** (Scunthorpe) (Con): We have a superb new accident and emergency in Scunthorpe, and we are pressing ahead with plans for a large, state-of-the-art community diagnostic centre. I have lived locally all my life, and those are some of the most significant upgrades we have seen in a generation. But there are things to do—we certainly need more NHS dentists. Would the Secretary of State consider a tie-in so that newly qualified dentists spend a minimum percentage of their time delivering NHS care?

**Steve Barclay:** I am pleased to see those services going into Scunthorpe. That underscores the investment we are making now while preparing for the long term, through the largest ever expansion in workforce training in the NHS's history. My hon. Friend is right about the importance of tie-ins. Let me explain why that matters in particular for dentists: around two thirds of dentists do not go on to do NHS work. That is why the plan has looked at tie-ins for dentistry, which we will explore in the weeks and months ahead.<sup>1</sup>

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Despite what the Secretary of State says, the Conservatives have finally admitted that they are out of ideas, and are adopting Labour's workforce plan. The NHS is short of more than 150,000 staff right now. More worryingly, the plan includes no mention of eye health, despite the crisis. In ophthalmology, 80% of eye units do not have enough consultants to meet current demand. Will the Secretary of State say how many years it will take for the NHS to have enough ophthalmologists? Why will he not back my Bill for a national eye health strategy for England, which will seek to tackle the crisis in eye health?

**Steve Barclay:** The question started by saying that we do not want plans for the future, we want to deal with the present, and finished by asking if we can have a plan for the future rather than for the present. The plan sets out significant additional numbers. Significant investment is going into eye services here and now. Let me give the House one example: at King's Lynn hospital, in addition to our investment in a new hospital to replace the reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete hospital, and in addition to the new diagnostic centre, I had the opportunity in the summer to open a new £3 million eye centre, which is doubling the number of patients who receive eye care in King's Lynn. That is just one practical example of our investment in eye services now.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): May I add my words of condolence for Lord Kerslake, who served on the greater Grimsby regeneration board, which oversees regeneration in the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area? We greatly

1. [Official Report, 12 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 7MC.]

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valued his experience and advice. Following the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft), it is important that we tie in dentists—and I would suggest GPs—to NHS services, but could they also be directed to areas of greatest need, such as northern Lincolnshire?

**Steve Barclay:** The Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) is looking at how we deliver more services within the existing contract, and at what incentives and reforms can be put in place to ensure that the parts of the country that find it hardest to recruit dentists are best able to do so, through both our domestic supply and international recruitment.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and the positivity he is trying to bring forward. The NHS workforce plan has concluded that the number of places in medical schools each year will rise from some 7,500 to 10,000, but in Northern Ireland it is a very different story: I know it is a devolved matter, but the Royal College of Nursing is facing cuts that could result in the number of places falling to 1,025 per academic year. Will the extra money that the Secretary of State announced be subject to Barnett consequentials? I know he is always keen to promote all this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland together, so what discussions has he had with the Northern Ireland Department of Health and the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that Northern Ireland is not left behind? When we are crying out for staff, our students should have a real opportunity to learn and work in the NHS field.

**Steve Barclay:** Barnett consequentials will apply to the £2.4 billion funding over the five years. In respect of new roles, regulatory changes apply on a UK-wide basis. The plan itself is for the NHS in England, but we stand ready to work with partners across the United Kingdom where there is shared learning on which we can work together.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am really pleased to see the 50% increase in the number of annual training places for GPs—it is music to my ears—but they will need somewhere to work. The £20 billion for the hospital programme is great, but when I look at section 106 applications for my constituency, I still see health getting a tiny proportion compared with education and the environment. May I have an assurance from the Secretary of State that as we increase the number of GPs in the primary care team, they will not have to scabble around trying to get little bits of money for planning applications here and there, but that there will be a guaranteed capital budget for new doctors, in the way that we are sorting that out for hospitals?

**Steve Barclay:** My hon. Friend raises a perfectly valid point. As we expand the primary care workforce, there is a capital consequence. The 50% expansion he talks about builds on the expansion from 2,100 in training in 2014 to 4,000 now, so there has already been an expansion, but we are taking that further by 50%—and on the higher figure. His point about section 106 applications is absolutely valid, and that is part of the primary care

recovery plan. I understand that he is discussing the importance of getting that funding in place with the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Given the number of pressures and crises that our NHS faces, it would be a mistake for the Secretary of State to be seen as complacent in how he delivered his workforce plan. Our job as MPs is to speak the truth to power, so I want to raise with him the lack of cancer treatment capacity, particularly in radiotherapy. International comparators suggest that between 55% and 60% of cancer patients should be able to access radiotherapy either directly or in tandem with other treatments. Currently, only 27% do. What is the Secretary of State doing to increase the size of the highly specialised and relatively small radiotherapy workforce? The target is for 85% of patients to start their first treatment within 62 days of an urgent GP referral. What is the current figure?

**Steve Barclay:** To take the hon. Gentleman's first point, the plan does not get into individual specialties. That was a Health Committee recommendation, which I have discussed with the Committee's Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine). There is a clear reason for that. Within the framework of numbers, the impact of AI and service design will evolve over the 15 years, so it is right that we commit to the number and then the NHS take that work forward with individual specialties and have discussions with the royal colleges.

The hon. Gentleman made a perfectly valid point about boosting capacity. We have already rolled out 108 of the 160 community diagnostic centres that we have committed to deliver. We are also looking to innovate, and I will give two practical examples. Our deal with Moderna, which is looking at individual bespoke vaccines for hard to treat cancers such as pancreatic cancer, will allow us to get ahead on that. We are already seeing a significant reduction in cervical cancer as a result of prevention measures. Likewise, by going into deprived communities with a high preponderance of smoking, the lung cancer screening programme is detecting lung cancer, which often presents late, much earlier, which in turn is having a significant impact on survival rates.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): I recently met a constituent who raised the issue of children's oral health and shared with me her concerns about the staffing crisis in specialist paediatric dentistry. According to the Government's own statistics, which were released in March, 29.3% of five-year-olds in England have enamel and/or dentinal decay, and the figure was as high as 38.7% in the north-west. The workforce plan talks of expanding dentistry training places by 24% by 2028-29, and by 40% by 2031-32. I note the Secretary of State's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris). However, there is no specific mention of specialist paediatric dentistry in the plan, so what will the Secretary of State do to help those children who are desperate for specialist dental treatment right now?

**Steve Barclay:** Without repeating my previous answer on specialty, we are boosting a number of areas. There are 5,000 more doctors and almost 13,000 more nurses

this year than last year. I have already touched on increasing the numbers in primary care. There are 44,000 more nurses, so we are on track to deliver our manifesto target of 50,000. There are 25% more within the workforce of the NHS compared with 2010. We are boosting the workforce overall. The plan is iterative and further work will go into which specialities are developed and how resource is prioritised as services are redesigned.

**Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): The Secretary of State will be aware that the recruitment and retention issues facing the NHS are particularly bad in rural areas. We felt the brunt of that in North Shropshire, with some of the worst ambulance waiting times, cancer treatment rates and diabetic care rates in the country. The plan does not go into much detail on what will be done to help rural areas, but it does acknowledge that by 2037, a third of all over-85s will live in rural places. I urge the Secretary of State to rural-proof this plan and to find ways to work on both the retention and the recruitment of healthcare professionals across the whole spectrum in North Shropshire and the rest of rural Britain.

**Steve Barclay:** The hon. Lady raises a fair point. It also applies to the issue of stroke. The elderly population has increased in many coastal and rural communities. That has created significant pressure: for legacy reasons, services are often in other parts of the country. We have five new medical schools in place, and we have looked at those parts of the country where it is often hard to recruit. Part of the expansion will be to look further at what services are needed in different areas. The hon. Lady's point also speaks to that raised by the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee. By giving greater autonomy to place-based commissioning through the integrated care systems, we will enable people at a more

local level to design the services and the workforce that they need, and that includes the flexibilities required to retain local staff.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I welcome the workforce plan. Given that it has taken 13 years, one tends to wonder why it has taken so long, but then of course we remember that there is a general election on the horizon.

Page 121 sets out a labour productivity rate of 1.5% to 2% per year. That has never been achieved by the NHS or any other comparable health system, so what assumptions is the Health and Social Care Secretary making in relation to achieving that?

**Steve Barclay:** First, this is a plan developed by colleagues in NHS England, so these are assumptions that have been agreed by those who lead within the NHS. It is about ensuring that people operate at the top of their licence. It is about having new and expanded roles, such as advanced practitioners and associate roles, that allow people to progress in their careers and, in doing so, freeing up capacity for senior clinicians, who often spend time doing things that do not need to be done by people in those roles.

Of course, there are also rapid changes in technology. We often talk about the developments in artificial intelligence, and I have touched on developments in the life sciences industry. I have also mentioned advances in screening and genomics. All those developments will in turn help us to prevent health conditions, and treating those conditions early will be not only better for the patient, but better value for money for the taxpayer.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and for responding to questions for 59 minutes.



## Point of Order

5.10 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It concerns the status of the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill., which we are about to discuss. It occurred to me during my examination of the Bill that there is, at the very least, a prima facie case that it is a hybrid Bill because of the private interests engaged alongside its public elements.

A number of classes of people are particularly affected. The private rights of all the groups in our society who are advocating for Palestinian rights will be affected in one way or another by the suppression of their ability to express their points of view, and that will absolutely apply to administrators of public funds. Those who manage local government pension schemes, for example, as well as the members of those schemes, will not be able to invest in a way that is free, particularly in respect of the state of Israel, the occupied Golan Heights and the occupied Palestinian territories, because of the exemption contained in the Bill. Local councillors will be similarly affected when it comes to expressing their points of view about the merits of being able to exercise power over economic assets for which they are democratically accountable. Muslims in the UK who support human rights in Palestine will also be disproportionately affected.

I have submitted a longer note on the basis of what legal advice I have been able to obtain at this short notice. It is my request to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to rule that there is a prima facie case that this is a hybrid Bill, and I invite you to refer it to a committee of experts that you would appoint to examine that case.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I thank the hon. Member for giving notice of his point of order. According to Erskine May, paragraph 30.57,

“Hybrid bills are public bills which are considered to affect specific private or local interests, in a manner different from the private or local interests of other persons or bodies of the same category, so as to attract the provisions of the standing orders relating to private business...Such bills are subject in both Houses to certain proceedings additional to the normal stages in the passing of public bills.

The Speaker has defined a hybrid bill as ‘a public bill which affects a particular private interest in a manner different from the private interest of other persons or bodies of the same category or class’...it is not the practice to treat as hybrid, bills dealing with matters of public policy whereby private rights over large areas or of a whole class are affected.”

All Bills are scrutinised on publication by the Clerk of Legislation in the Public Bill Office, in consultation with his opposite number in the House of Lords, to see whether they are prima facie hybrid and need to be referred to the examiners. This Bill was not referred to the examiners. However, the hon. Member has put his view on the record, and if he wishes further clarification, I suggest that he go back to the Public Bill Office to put forward his views one more time.

## Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

*Second Reading*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** The reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition has been selected.

5.14 pm

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I hope the House will allow me first to pay tribute to Lord Kerslake, who, as the House will know, died over the weekend after a short illness. Bob Kerslake was a true public servant, steeped throughout his professional life in local and central Government, and wholly dedicated throughout his career to improving the lives of citizens. He began his career with Greater London Council and went on to run, with distinction, Sheffield City Council—the fourth largest in England—before making the switch to the corridors of Whitehall. He was the first chief executive of the Homes and Communities Agency, the forerunner to Homes England, a vital arm of Government in making sure that affordable housing is available to all. He was deservedly promoted to become permanent secretary to the Department for Communities and Local Government and, later, head of the home civil service, where he served with great distinction and kindness. Speaking personally as a Minister in the Governments where he served, I was deeply grateful to Bob for his dedication, his generosity of spirit and his wise advice.

After leaving Government, Bob led the inquiry into the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. More recently, he chaired the UK2070 Commission on regional inequalities. My colleagues and I greatly valued his work on homelessness with the Kerslake commission, and I think we all agree that his energy, knowledge and wisdom will be greatly missed. I know that right hon. and hon. Members across the House will wish to join me in sending our deepest condolences to his family in their grief. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] I thank you, Mr Speaker, and colleagues across the House.

The Bill does four things: it honours a manifesto promise to which this Government recommitted in the last Queen’s Speech; it affirms the important principle that UK foreign policy is a matter for the UK Government; it ensures that local authorities concentrate on serving their residents, not directing resources inefficiently; and, critically, it provides protection for minority communities, especially the Jewish community, against campaigns that harm community cohesion and fuel antisemitism.

In our 2019 manifesto, this Government committed to “ban public bodies from imposing their own direct or indirect boycotts, disinvestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries.”

The Bill does just that—no more and no less.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): I think it does a fifth thing, which is to introduce a thought crime. Were I to be a leader of a local authority opposed to the provisions of this Bill, once it became an Act, if I continued to say that I disagreed with its provisions and what I might wish to have done with the



powers I retained were those provisions not to have been made law, I would be breaking the law. That cannot be right in a free society, can it?

**Michael Gove:** It would not be right if the Bill restricted local authorities from adopting policies that they considered to be in line with Government policy. It is also the case that it would be problematic if we were to restrict freedom of speech in any way, but the Bill does not do that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Michael Gove:** Not at this point—I will in a second.

It is important to stress what the Bill does not do. It does not restrict local authorities adopting policies in line with formal, agreed Government sanctions, embargoes and restrictions. It does not impede local authorities considering legitimate commercial factors related to business with a foreign state, and exercising due diligence in the award of contracts. And it does not prevent a local authority from exercising due diligence when considering whether a supplier or investment target might be involved in environmental misconduct, bribery, competition law infringements or labour misconduct, including human trafficking and modern slavery. In no way does the Bill circumscribe anyone's right to freedom of speech or conscience.

What the Bill does do is prevent local authorities from singling out individual nations for discriminatory treatment on the basis of an ideological opposition to that nation and its fundamental basis. Action is required here because there is an existing, organised and malign campaign that aims to target and delegitimise the world's only Jewish state. That campaign seeks to persuade public bodies to make commercial decisions solely on the basis of harming that state and its people.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way so soon in this debate.

Is not the reason every single Conservative Member stood on a manifesto commitment to bring forward such legislation that we understand that there is something fundamentally illiberal, leftist and with deep, ugly connections to antisemitism at the heart of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement? That is what we are trying to tackle today.

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I shall go on to say more about the nature of the BDS campaign because we are not talking in the abstract; we are talking in concrete terms about a campaign that exists, and has been in operation now for nearly 20 years, based on a premise that seeks to delegitimise the state of Israel. The campaign also leads directly, as I shall point out, to antisemitic incidents and a loss of community cohesion.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I just remind the Secretary of State that the Bill goes way beyond the activities of the state of Israel and will apply potentially to other areas of foreign policy, too. Has he considered whether the interaction of clause 1(7) and clause 4 will disproportionately interfere with the freedom of expression, and of conscience and belief, of individuals who are making, or have a stake in, the procurement

and investment decisions of public bodies? My view and that of many other lawyers who have looked at the Bill is that it will. Why has he not produced a human rights memorandum analysing the extent to which the Bill interferes with rights under article 10 and article 9, on freedom of belief, of the European convention on human rights, and article 19 of the international covenant on civil and political rights? Will he do so?

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely. Nothing in the Bill conflicts with any aspect of the ECHR, not least article 10.

**Sir Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend is bringing this legislation to the House today. He rightly mentioned the unsavoury connotations of much of the criticism that the Bill is facing, particularly in connection with the BDS movement. On that point, could he clarify his thoughts on Richard Hermer KC, who has provided advice to the shadow Front-Bench team on this legislation? Mr Hermer has previously authored a chapter in a book called “Corporate complicity in Israel's occupation: evidence from the London session of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine”, which is edited by some extremely interesting people—I fear that they are interesting in the most negative sense. Is this really the calibre of individual who should be advising the official Opposition?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend raises an important question because the Opposition have tabled a reasoned amendment. I believe they have done so in good faith. As the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) pointed out, some lawyers take a different view from the Government. One of those lawyers was commissioned by the Labour party to produce a legal opinion, but the gentleman concerned, a distinguished KC, has a record in this area—a record of political commitments that everyone can see clearly predispose him towards a political and particular view on this question.

**Joanna Cherry:** On that point—

**Michael Gove:** No. I am merely pointing out what is in the public domain. Let us turn to the nature of the BDS campaign.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Michael Gove:** Not at this point. The BDS movement deliberately asks public bodies to treat Israel differently from any other nation on the globe. It asks them to treat the middle east's only democracy as a pariah state and to end links with those who have a commercial presence there. Let me be clear: there are legitimate reasons to criticise the Israeli Government, to question their policy and, if individuals so wish, to repudiate their leadership, as there are with many other countries.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Michael Gove:** No. Nothing in the Bill prevents or impedes the loudest of criticisms of Israel's Government and leaders, including by elected politicians at all levels of government.

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

**Michael Gove:** No. But the BDS movement asks that, alone among nations, Israel be treated as illegitimate in itself—

**Dr Whitford:** Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Michael Gove:** No. The founder of the BDS movement, Omar Barghouti, has been clear in his opposition to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. He has attacked what he calls the “racist principles of Zionism”—that is, the fundamental right of the Jewish people to self-determination. The man who founded and is in charge of the BDS movement has argued that Zionist principles “maintain Israel’s character as a colonial, ethnocentric, apartheid state.”

On that basis, he opposes any idea of a two-state solution—a secure Israel alongside a viable and democratic Palestine. Instead, the BDS movement’s leader wants a “one-state solution... where, by definition, Jews will be a minority.” It is entirely open to any individual to agree with that proposition, but it is no part of this Government’s determination or intent to give any heart or succour to a movement that argues that the two-state solution is wrong and that Jews should be a minority in one state.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend help us here? As the effect of Israeli policy since 1967 has been to build out of existence the possibility of a two-state solution by settling 700,000 Jews who have arrived in the state of Israel, with their right to go there under Israeli law, it is now no longer possible for there to be a two-state solution, so what is British policy to be?

**Michael Gove:** British policy is, as my hon. Friend knows, to promote a two-state solution. I know that he has a long, passionate and committed interest in this subject and I respect the compassion and knowledge that he brings to the debate but, respectfully, I disagree with him. I believe that a two-state solution is the right approach, which the BDS movement does not believe.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I very much welcome the legislation that the Secretary of State is introducing, and we as a party will support it when the time comes tonight. There are many examples in Northern Ireland of councils having overstepped the mark by boycotting goods from Israel and penalising and focusing attention on the small Jewish community. Local authorities should be working hard to support diversity and good relations, not ridiculing and condemning our small and minority communities. It is clear to me that the point of the legislation is to make sure that that does not happen, so let us make sure that it goes through tonight.

**Michael Gove:** I agree, as I do almost always, with every word that the hon. Gentleman said.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Michael Gove:** I will take interventions in due course, but I want to make a little progress first.

I want to be clear about what the BDS movement is and what it does. The BDS movement is not, in its origins or operation, a campaign that is designed to change Israel’s Government or shift Israel’s policy. It is designed to erase Israel’s identity as a home for the Jewish people. Again, the founders of the BDS campaign have been clear, saying:

“A Jewish state in Palestine in any shape or form cannot but contravene the basic rights of the...Palestinian population and...ought to be opposed categorically”.

Alongside those who lead the BDS movement on the BDS national committee sit members of the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, a coalition of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—all militant organisations that are proscribed by this Government.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Michael Gove:** I will give way in due course, but not at this point.

The effects of the campaign are sadly manifold. The BDS campaign opposes efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians together to broker peace through a two-state solution, opposes cultural exchanges between Israelis and Palestinians, and fights against co-operation between Israeli and Palestinian universities. BDS has specifically denounced an organisation called OneVoice, which is a joint Palestinian-Israeli youth organisation that campaigns to end the occupation, campaigns against settlements and campaigns for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Because OneVoice does not use the rhetoric of apartheid that BDS deploys, and because it does believe that there should be a Jewish state, it is denounced by the BDS movement.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Michael Gove:** I will make more progress and then give way.

Where the BDS campaign has been adopted and endorsed there have, unfortunately, been real community-cohesion problems. We have seen an increase in antisemitic events following on from the activities of the BDS movement, including supermarkets removing kosher products from their shelves following specific protests. The Community Security Trust has recently recorded the highest ever number of antisemitic incidents.

In evidence adduced before the Supreme Court in 2020, the following point was made. The evidence said that

“although anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian campaigning in itself is”,

obviously,

“not anti-Semitic, there is a pattern of anti-Semitic behaviour in connection with campaigns promoting a boycott of Israel. For example, protests outside an Israeli-owned shop in central Manchester in summer 2014 led to some Jewish people using the shop being racially abused by protestors, including shoppers”—

I hope the House will forgive me—

“being called ‘Child killer’, comments such as ‘You Jews are scum and the whole world hates you’, and Nazi salutes being made at Jewish shoppers using the Israeli-owned store. On social media, hashtags such as #BDS, #BoycottIsrael and #FreePalestine are regularly used by people posting anti-Semitic tweets and comments.”

That is why Labour Friends of Israel has rightly stated:

“BDS damages communal relations and fosters antisemitism at home, while doing nothing to further the cause of peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. Public bodies should not be singling out the world’s only Jewish state for boycotts.”

Luke Akehurst, a Labour NEC member speaking in a personal capacity, has also argued that we should

“welcome the Government’s proposed bill to end the ability of public sector bodies to carry out boycotts and divestment.”

Mr Akehurst added that he was against BDS more widely

“because it deepens the divisions in the Middle East conflict rather than encouraging dialogue and coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. BDS demonises and delegitimises Israel”.

I agree with Labour Friends of Israel, I agree with Luke Akehurst, I agree with the Board of Deputies, and I agree with the Jewish Leadership Council, all of whom back this Bill. I agree with the French and German Governments who have taken action against the BDS movement, and I agree with all 50 Governors of US states—Democrat and Republican—who have denounced the BDS movement. The question for every Member of this House is whether they stand with us against antisemitism or not.

**Alicia Kearns:** I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Although I disagree fundamentally with the point that he has just tried to make, my question to him is this: has a single diplomatic post specifically advised that the Bill contravenes our UN Security Council requirements and resolutions?

**Michael Gove:** I am sorry, but I missed the point—forgive me.

**Alicia Kearns:** Has any diplomatic post specifically advised the Government that what is being proposed this evening in the Bill contravenes our UN Security Council resolutions?

**Michael Gove:** I know of no such advice.

**Mr Dhesi:** This ill-drafted Bill has multiple contradictions, as excellent legal advice has highlighted, and it may actually contravene international law. Although the Secretary of State may be happy that he will have these additional powers, the Bill will no doubt be subject to multiple legal challenges, and therefore a lot of taxpayers’ money will once again be wasted by the Government. Does he concede that well beyond BDS and the middle east, the Bill may hamper the UK’s ability to protect and preserve human rights across the world?

**Michael Gove:** No, I absolutely do not. The Bill enhances the UK Government’s ability to protect human rights across the globe. On the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about legal challenge, it is the case that organisations such as the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and others have challenged the Government in this area in the past. They may do so again, but I am confident that the Bill is legally watertight. On the point—

**Joanna Cherry:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Michael Gove:** No, I am answering the hon. Gentleman’s question first.

On the point about the legal advice from Mr Hermer KC, as I have said, we believe that that legal advice is flawed and it comes from someone who has a clear political record of partiality on this question.

**Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op):** I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. I hope he will recognise that many of us in this House have stood up to the BDS movement. Therefore, his rather intemperate suggestion that only if we support this legislation are we against antisemitism does not pass muster. Does he recognise that those of us who would like to see local authorities challenged—perhaps through the Equality Act 2010—can find troublesome elements in this Bill? It is almost as if his myopia about the BDS movement has blinded him to the consequences of this and what it could do.

The Secretary of State boasted earlier that there were exemptions around labour rights and environmental laws, but is it not ironic that the Bill does not include an exemption around genocide? Those of us who have communities that are desperately concerned about the Uyghurs, the Rohingyas or what happened in Sri Lanka recognise that this legislation could stop our speaking out for them. Will he work with us—those of us who want to tackle antisemitism and to stand up for human rights—and rethink his proposals?

**Michael Gove:** I have a lot of respect for the hon. Lady and I acknowledge her work to fight antisemitism and stand against the BDS movement—more than acknowledge it, I applaud her for it. I would say three things. First, there is absolutely nothing in the Bill that prevents the UK Government or other public bodies from taking appropriate action against Myanmar, against China over the treatment of the Uyghurs or against Russia and Belarus over their aggression towards Ukraine. I have seen no solid legal advice to suggest that is the case at all.

Secondly, if the hon. Lady or anybody else wants to table amendments in Committee that can improve the Bill, I am completely open to them. I have not yet seen any such amendments, but I know she and others in this House are skilled in drafting legislation, and I look forward to seeing the appropriate amendments. However, as we have seen in the past, attempts to deal with the specific menace that the BDS campaign creates through guidance have not been sufficient. Primary legislation is required. The shape of that legislation I hope we can decide together across the House.

**Dr Whitford:** The Secretary of State mentioned that it is the UK’s long-standing policy to support a two-state solution. It is also the UK’s long-standing policy to differentiate between Israel and the occupied territories. The UK endorsed United Nations resolution 2334. Why is there no differentiation in the Bill between Israel and the occupied territories? Does that not increase the risk of antisemitism?

**Michael Gove:** No; they are separated in the Bill. I am afraid the hon. Lady is wrong.

**Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con):** My right hon. Friend is being very generous in listening to the rather strong opinions on the Bill, but can I press him again to consider alternative ways to deal with the threat of BDS without offering the glass jaw that I see



[*Sir Robert Buckland*]

clause 3(7) as presenting to parliamentarians, and to work with me and others to find a better way to do this? I will also say that ad hominem attacks on independent counsel, whoever they are, are not advisable and not wise.

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. Of course we are completely open to the consideration of any amendments that can give better effect to the shared intentions that we have across the House to deal with this movement. However, Israel is there in the Bill because of the clear nature and the clear and present activities of the BDS campaign. Were there to be an alternative, one would have to make sure that it dealt effectively with that area.

**Sir Brandon Lewis** (Great Yarmouth) (Con): Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the generosity he is showing in giving way. I support what he says about the importance of setting a clear marker on the menace of the BDS movement and its impact across communities. Does he agree that the Bill potentially goes further, in a positive way, by making the point that it is for local government to spend taxpayers' money on services and other issues for their constituents in the best available way, not using it—or abusing it—on ideological issues, and that, whether in expenditure for the local community or through local government pension scheme investments, it should be aimed at getting the best return for constituents and beneficiaries, not at driving ideological wedges between communities?

**Michael Gove:** I think my right hon. Friend is completely right. Local government has a critical role in delivering public services, including support for the most vulnerable in our communities. It is vital that central Government support it in that endeavour and that local government should not be diverted from its core purpose by other temptations.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): The Secretary of State said earlier that the Bill fulfils a manifesto commitment, but the manifesto commitment was not country-specific; it was country-agnostic. There was no mention of Israel or BDS in it. Indeed, another manifesto commitment was that we would champion freedom of expression and tolerance. He will recall that a former Secretary of State for Education wrote to all our universities to ensure that they allowed freedom of expression. How is that compatible with clause 4(1)(b), which states that any person who

“would intend to act in such a way”—

of having a boycott on any part of a foreign country—  
“were it lawful to do so”,

would be prohibited from doing so and would be penalised by the courts for doing so? How does that represent championing freedom of expression and tolerance?

**Michael Gove:** I should say to my hon. Friend, whose commitment to advancing peace and to freedom of speech I respect, that all the Bill seeks to do is to ensure that boycotts and boycotts in name only cannot be brought forward. It has absolutely no effect—chilling or otherwise—on the exercise of freedom of speech.

**Tim Loughton:** I agree with the Secretary of State that there is a particular problem to do with Israel and BDS, but the Bill is not country-specific. Nor is it specific on whether it applies to investment or disinvestment. Of all the Bills I have ever read, it is particularly woolly in its drafting. Will the Secretary of State respond to a few scenarios? We found out that a number of local authorities in this country are twinned with Chinese towns. If they choose to un-twin with those Chinese towns, will they fall foul of the Bill? They are investing in twinning offices and travel expenses. If they were instead to set up a twinning agreement with a Taiwanese town, for example, or to set up a Hong Kong freedom centre, would they fall foul of the legislation? Indeed, under clause 1(2), on decisions

“influenced by political or moral disapproval of foreign state conduct”,

would flying a Ukrainian flag over a town hall fall foul of the Bill as well?

**Michael Gove:** I cannot see that any of those actions would fall foul of the legislation in any way. It is clearly the case that, in each of the areas that my hon. Friend mentions, particularly with respect to China, the Government are taking appropriate action to demonstrate our consistent disapproval of China's behaviour, not just in Xinjiang but specifically, as he rightly mentions, in Hong Kong.

**Mr William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

**Michael Gove:** Not at the moment.

It is important, following on from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), to make clear that there is no evidence that anything in the Bill will impede our ability or that of local government to act against modern slavery in Xinjiang or environmental misconduct in Myanmar, or to maintain a united front against Russian aggression. Nor is there anything in the Bill to prevent any individual, including councillors, from articulating in their own right any opinion that they personally hold. It is also important to make clear that nothing in the Bill changes in any way UK Government foreign policy or our position on the middle east peace process. Nothing in it alters our support for an adherence to UN resolutions, and nothing in it explicitly or implicitly supports current Israeli Government policy towards settlements in the west bank.

**Mr Wragg:** By virtue of my right hon. Friend's capacious mind, he has had the UK's foreign policy delegated to his Department as well. He said in answer to the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns)—indeed, he just reiterated the point—that nothing in the Bill will endanger our international obligations. Presumably, with that capacious mind, he has read the write-round from the Foreign Office, which says directly that FCDO lawyers advise that the clause on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories would significantly increase the risk of the UK being in breach of our commitments under UN Security Council resolution 2334. Has he had a word with our right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary about that?

**Michael Gove:** Yes. Across Government, every Minister supports the Bill, and quite rightly, because it gives effect to our manifesto commitment and ensures that we live up to the responsibilities that we have to deal with divisive campaigns that operate on the ground in a way that adversely affects minority communities and, most especially, the Jewish community.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Michael Gove:** I am coming to the end of my remarks.

I recognise that many people have, in good faith, expressed concerns about aspects of the Bill, but I point out that the provisions are specifically designed to provide a high bar to ensure that local government acts as it should in accordance with the interest of its citizens, to ensure that UK foreign policy is articulated with one voice, and to ensure in particular that a campaign that those on both Front Benches are clear has been responsible for the demonisation of the state of Israel, for the delegitimation of its right to exist and for discrimination against Jewish people in this country, is, at last, dealt with. For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** As I said earlier, the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition has been selected. I call Lisa Nandy to move that amendment.

5.44 pm

**Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House, while opposing any discrimination or prejudice in the economic activities of public bodies, believing that all such bodies must act without bias or selectivity when making ethical decisions on procurement and investment and recognising the impact selective and biased campaigns have had on the Jewish community in particular, declines to give a Second Reading to the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, because the Bill risks significantly undermining support for groups around the world facing persecution, for example the Uyghur, who are currently victims of grave and systemic human rights abuses, is incompatible with international law and the due diligence of public bodies, undermines the UK’s long-standing cross-party position in respect of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Golan Heights by conflating these with the State of Israel and running counter to UN Security Council Resolutions, singles out the State of Israel in effect creating the issue it intends to solve, seeks to enforce its provisions by giving unprecedented powers to the Secretary of State beyond those enjoyed by the police and the security services, places unprecedented restrictions on the ability of public bodies, many of them directly elected, to express a view on policy, current, proposed and desired, has potential widespread and negative impacts on local government pension funds, limits freedom of speech and is likely to be subject to repeated and extended legal challenge by reason of its conflict with established legal principles; and therefore urges the Government to bring forward alternative proposals.”

I recognise the Secretary of State’s very touching words on Lord Kerslake. He was Lord Kerslake to some, but Bob to those of us who have benefited over many years from his ceaseless encouragement and advice. His knowledge of central Government and local government was unparalleled. His commitment as a genuine public servant who cared deeply about people will be badly missed. He was taken from us too soon, and I would like to add our voice to the very touching tribute from the Secretary of State.

It is perhaps in the spirit that Bob would have wanted that I approach the Bill—on a note of consensus, on something that ought to be a matter of consensus for Labour Members. I recognise that there are deeply held feelings about these issues, and I want to acknowledge that Members in this debate must be heard. I shall, of course, welcome interventions, but I will seek to balance that with the need of Members on both sides of the House, whether I disagree with them or not, to make their views known.

I want to begin by saying to the Secretary of State that we recognise the problem which he says the Bill is designed to tackle. It is therefore deeply frustrating that the Government have introduced a Bill that is needlessly broad, with sweeping, draconian powers and far-reaching effects. Instead of Members on both sides of the House having the opportunity to come together and welcome long-overdue action, he faces genuine, legitimate, heartfelt opposition from Conservative Members; from groups who face persecution, such as the Uyghur, who thought that we stood with them; from human rights groups; and from local government. I have watched the Secretary of State lose Government Members because of the tone that he has struck in the debate. I hope that as the debate progresses he will listen to some of those concerns.

I say to the House that it does not have to be this way. It is not, in our view, wrong for public bodies to take ethical investment and procurement decisions. In fact, there is a long history of councils, universities and others taking a stance in defence of freedom and human rights. In the case of elected councils, their electors often expect them to do just that. There is a difference between legitimate criticism of a foreign state’s Government and what some individuals and organisations have tried to do in recent years, which the Secretary of State outlined well. To seek to target Israel alone, to hold it to different standards from other countries, to question its right to exist, to equate the actions of the Israeli Government with Jewish people, and in doing so create hate and hostility against Jewish people here in the UK is completely wrong.

There is at least one example of a publicly funded body that has taken a stance against the state of Israel that has effectively cancelled Jewish culture here in the UK. We will always stand against that. Most public bodies would not dream of behaving like that, but even one incident has unacceptable and far-reaching consequences for the Jewish community, increasing hate and hostility at a time when antisemitic attacks have reached a peak, children learn behind gates, and security guards stand outside synagogues.

**Stephen Crabb:** The hon. Lady is speaking really well, and she gave a remarkable Second Reading speech on the Holocaust Memorial Bill.

The hon. Lady is trying to suggest that examples of BDS are few and far between, and that it is a legitimate field of activity for public bodies to comment on foreign policy and express ethical concerns. The trouble is, time and time again, it is about BDS and it is about targeting Israel. When the Welsh Government issued a procurement advice note two years ago, they were trying to single out Israel yet again, and no Labour MP said a thing about it. Is that not the problem?

**Lisa Nandy:** I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that I feel strongly that BDS offers no meaningful route to peace either for the Palestinians or for the Israelis. I can assure him that when BDS is used as an argument for the total economic, social and cultural isolation of the world's only Jewish state, not only will I speak out but I have spoken out time and time again. As far as I know, I am the only Member in the House—there may be others, and I apologise in advance if I have missed anyone—who has gone directly to take on those who argue for a boycott, divestment and sanctions against the state of Israel and for a one-state solution. I have taken on that argument, because I firmly believe that it is wrong and unhelpful. As I have just made clear to the House, this might not be every public body—I do not believe for a moment that it is—but one incident is too many. It has profound effects on the Jewish community.

That is why so many people in the Jewish community have fought long and hard for action to tackle this problem, and it is why we support them. In fact, we were sufficiently concerned about it that earlier this year we tried to amend the Procurement Bill to ensure that when councils take ethical decisions, they do so in line with an ethical framework and Government guidance and apply those decisions across the board, not seeking to single out any one country for differential treatment. We believe that that amendment offered clarity and certainty to our elected officials and councils, and security for the Jewish community, and we were disappointed that the Government voted it down. However, we continue to believe that there is not—and never should be—disagreement between us on that principle.

I also do not believe there is disagreement between us on whether we oppose the policy of boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel. Opposing that policy is a long-standing Labour position, and it will not change. As I said to the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) a moment ago, it is something I feel so strongly about that I have taken the opportunity to debate with those who expound that policy and who believe in a one-state solution, which we thoroughly oppose. I have made the case that talk of a one-state solution and boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel offers no meaningful route to peace for Palestinians or Israelis. Over the past decade, the one bright spot on a very difficult horizon that I have seen on my trips to the middle east has been the co-existence and joint venture projects that have flourished, through which BDS drives a coach and horses.

We on the Labour Benches do not claim that all those who support BDS, despite our profound disagreement with them on that issue, are antisemitic. Our concern is with those who have tried to whip up hostility towards Jewish people under the cover of either BDS or the targeting of Israel, particularly those who seek the total economic, social and cultural isolation of the world's only Jewish state. That is what we must deal with, in a way that is enforceable—that has real impact and real teeth—and that tackles the problem it is designed to solve.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that we have worked hard to ensure that we are not antisemitic, and that for the Minister to display what he has done in the Chamber does no good to our democracy? This is a very badly written Bill—it

is not a good Bill—and the Minister's suggestion that anyone who votes against it is antisemitic is just a disgrace and something he should withdraw.

**Lisa Nandy:** This is a debate that needs far less heat and far more light, because we are talking about real people—about communities in the UK who are among the most marginalised and discriminated against in our country. I thank the Secretary of State for acknowledging in his opening remarks that Labour Front Benchers are acting in good faith in the approach we have taken, but I would echo a note of caution: we should not in any sense suggest that Members, of all parties in this House, who have expressed profound reservations about the Bill in front of us can be deemed to be antisemitic. They are not. They are participating in democracy and giving voice to real concerns. They are doing what we were sent to this House to do: scrutinise legislation and ensure that it has the intended impact. I encourage Members to continue to do so, because a Bill that is designed to promote and protect community cohesion can proceed only with the broadest possible consent.

**Joanna Cherry:** I thank the hon. Lady for what she has just said, because I also found the Secretary of State's suggestion that those of us who oppose the Bill are condoning antisemitism, or are in fact antisemitic, to be disgraceful. Has she, like me, seen a public letter to the Secretary of State from a number of British-based Jewish academic experts in the fields of Jewish studies, the study of antisemitism and Israel studies, including my dear friend Professor Francesca Klug OBE, visiting professor of human rights at the London School of Economics? They have expressed the view that this legislation is damaging and wrong-headed and should be withdrawn. Will the hon. Lady confirm that that is a letter from leading British Jewish academics?

**Lisa Nandy:** I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for raising those concerns. We are keen that all the voices in this debate ought to be heard; I have heard different views from across the Jewish community, but I have to say to her that the overwhelming view I have heard is that there is a desperate need to tackle this very real problem. The strength of feeling in the Jewish community that we must legislate to tackle this problem is overwhelming. I do not want for one moment to deny that that is what I have heard in my frequent conversations with the Jewish community, but as I will outline, there are serious problems with the Bill that need to be addressed.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): I am grateful for the hon. Lady for giving way, and for the tone she has struck. As someone who has a significant proportion of Jewish constituents, I speak in defence of them. The BDS movement and its increased presence on university campuses has seen the Community Security Trust state that there has been a 22% increase in campus antisemitism. We are now in a situation where many of my constituents will not go to university because they face such hostility, so the enthusiasm for the Bill may not be about its drafting, but about the aims that it seeks to achieve.

**Lisa Nandy:** That is absolutely right. In fact, the Union of Jewish Students, which has expressed real concerns about the Bill—the very students who have often been



the targets of the appalling abuse and attacks that the hon. Gentleman has outlined—is clear that it wants to see this problem tackled. I hope that is a basis on which we can proceed across the House in a debate that, as I have said, needs far more light and far less heat. I remain confident that, with good faith and good will on everyone's part, we can find a way to tackle what is a very real problem for the Jewish community in this country.

I will take a moment to explain why the Bill does not do what the Government intend it to do. Clause 1 attempts to ban public bodies from taking decisions influenced by

“political or moral disapproval of foreign state conduct.”

We have commissioned legal advice that suggests there are two readings of the clause. I would just say to some Conservative Members that a King's counsel—a distinguished King's counsel who happens to disagree about the legal impact of this legislation—deserves a hearing and deserves respect. If in a democracy those who disagree with us are accused of acting dishonestly or in bad faith, we are in a very dark place indeed. That legal advice suggests that on first reading the clause applies only when it relates to specific territories. That would create the absurd situation where public bodies could refuse goods from China because of general disregard for human rights, but could not refuse cotton goods from Xinjiang because of concerns about genocide against the Uyghur population.

The second reading of the clause, which I imagine is what the Government intend, is that public bodies are banned from having any regard at all to human rights violations of foreign Governments unless they are expressly permitted by this Government. There are a few exceptions in the schedule referred to in clause 3—labour rights, bribery and the environment—but not genocide, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) has said, or systematic torture or grave breaches of the Geneva convention. After the horrors of the second world war, it was British diplomats who held the pen, crafting the international legal system that recognised that some crimes are so grave that they should never be acceptable. What has changed that gives the Government grounds to create two tiers through this Bill—to deem slavery unacceptable, but remain silent on the issue of genocide? Have we given up believing that these things matter?

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does she share my concerns that the Bill will weaken our voice on the international stage in tackling human rights abuses? It will enable many regimes with appalling human rights records, or companies that have track records of labour law violations or environmental recklessness, to continue without consequence, including where those abuses are incompatible with international law.

**Lisa Nandy**: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that concern, which has also been raised with me. I defer to the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), who I know will make a contribution in due course.

What is not clear to me and other Labour Members is why the Government have sought to draw this Bill's powers so broadly. It is not just breathtaking in its reach; it is deeply contradictory, because the Bill itself accepts that there will be times when public bodies will

take a view about the conduct of foreign Governments on specific grounds, such as modern slavery. In fact, the Secretary of State wrote to councils last year urging them to do so in the case of Russia, and has since signalled his intent to add Russia and Belarus to the list of exceptions allowed by clause 3. Only two years ago in this House, I sat on these Benches as we proudly and rightly passed the Magnitsky regulations, which recognised the power of economic sanctions to direct state conduct and raise global standards. However, the Secretary of State is now proposing a Bill that will prevent—for example—the Department for Business and Trade from taking human rights violations into account when deciding whether to grant export credit guarantees. Surely he can see the problem. The Cameron Government became a signatory to the UN guiding principles on business and human rights a decade ago. The Government's own action plan makes it clear that businesses have a corporate responsibility to uphold human rights and to monitor those they deal with commercially. After years of promising to hand over powers and spending decisions to Mayors, combined authorities and councils, is the Secretary of State seriously saying that they are not capable of exercising the same duty?

There are other areas of deep confusion in this Bill that we believe will open up the prospect of ongoing legal challenge, and I know that has been raised by Conservative Members. Clause 1 bans action that a reasonable observer would conclude is motivated by moral or political disapproval of a foreign Government, but on these deeply contested notions what constitutes a “reasonable observer”?

Clause 4 is even more problematic. It prohibits public bodies from expressing a view not just about how they intend to act, but how they would have done so had the law not been in force. It is difficult to know how public bodies, particularly those that are elected, should respond to this. In recent years, many councils have, for example, been asked by their own residents not to use Chinese companies with links to Xinjiang. My own council is one of them. Under this Bill, faced with thousands of people signing a public petition, a council would not even be able to give any indication of whether or not it agreed with its own residents. Our legal advice suggests that this extraordinary situation is likely to be incompatible with article 10 of the European convention on human rights.

Clause 3(7) creates even more confusion. It singles out Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan heights as places for which no exemption can ever be made. The long-standing position of the UK Government is to support a two-state solution along pre-1967 lines that protects and respects the security and right to self-determination of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. This clause drives a coach and horses through that, according the occupied territories the same protected status as Israel and in effect conflating the two. It contradicts established Government policy, and I find it hard to believe that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has agreed to this. I note the questions from two Conservative Members, and I am deeply concerned that it appears that the Government and the Secretary of State have not even asked that question. It appears that Conservative Members have seen a circular from Foreign Office officials raising objections to this Bill, yet the Secretary of State has not. I urge him to look closely at that matter before the Bill proceeds.

**Dr Whitford:** The hon. Lady talks about when she has visited Israel or Palestine, as I have done regularly with the breast cancer projects I am involved with in Gaza and the west bank. The thing is that the settlements are illegal under international law, and they have been condemned by the Government in the past. Obviously, companies, pension funds, councils and devolved Governments who try to act ethically and do not wish to purchase settlement goods, which are illegal, would be flooded by that clause. How does that match with current UK policy?

**Lisa Nandy:** I hope, as the debate goes on, that there may be an answer to this, but I have to confess that so far I am at a loss as to what it might be. Where does this leave our commitment to international law, given that it cuts across UN resolutions, as Conservative Members have highlighted, and weakens Britain's stated support for a two-state solution, as the hon. Member has said?

The legal advice we have received strongly suggests that this is likely to be in breach of our international law obligations. Furthermore, it will force the UK courts, which have traditionally been reluctant to adjudicate on issues relating to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, to take a view. All of these confusing and contradictory measures raise the very real prospect of protracted legal challenge. One of the Conservative Members recently called this woolly. Surely the Secretary of State can see that protracted legal challenge over the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the practice of boycott, divestment and sanctions would not be in the interests of community cohesion, which is the very thing this Bill is designed to protect.

**Dawn Butler:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Lisa Nandy:** I will not give way, if my hon. Friend will forgive me. A lot of people are wishing to speak, and given that she has made one intervention, I will make a bit of progress.

As if that were not bad enough, it seems that nobody in Government has thought of the consequences for local government pension funds, which is arguably the one area where councils have to have a global outlook. Let me give the Secretary of State a practical example. In recent months, as he will know, three Israeli companies have moved their money outside Israel due to concerns about the financial risks created by the contentious reforms to the judiciary. If a local government pension fund were to do the same, this Bill would open it up to legal challenge, forcing it to prove to a reasonable observer, whatever that is, that its decision was on financial, not moral grounds.

Writing in the *Local Government Chronicle*, the director of pensions at Westminster Council asks what happens "where an analyst has anticipated that a company's value will decrease because of ESG decisions it has made... if that strategy falls within the new law's definition of not being in line with UK foreign defence policy, and the law therefore states that the fund must remain invested, and the fund therefore loses value, who will pay for that?... The government's current message is that 'this is not designed to get in the way of ESG factors, excepting the very narrow area of UK foreign or defence policy'. But this is absolutely not a very narrow area."

He adds:

"We could end up in a scenario with never ending arguments involving ESG factors versus foreign and defence policy."

Surely that cannot be the intention of this Government.

**Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab):** I think I agree with everything my hon. Friend has said this afternoon. She will remember, as I do, how many of us on the Opposition Benches, and indeed in all of the House, spent years of our lives campaigning against the apartheid regime. That was a very strong policy within local authorities and it had real impact at the time, so much so that when Nelson Mandela came to this country to thank people, he included them in those thanks. Does she believe that, had this legislation been enacted at the time, it would have prevented those authorities from taking the action they did to oppose apartheid?

**Lisa Nandy:** South Africa is obviously a different case, but the point my hon. Friend makes remains and is well founded, because this Bill concentrates the decision making and judgment of hundreds of public bodies in the hands of just one person.

**Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con):** The hon. Lady talked about pensions, and there is an additional point. Whatever people may think of BDS or of an investment strategy that is ethical or otherwise, the money that sits in the local government pension scheme—and I am a member of the local government pension scheme—is the members' money, my money. It is not the Government's money to direct in one way or another; it belongs to the pension holders, and it is surely for them and those to whom they delegate its management to decide how it should be deployed. As she rightly says, if the Government are getting into the business of managing my pension money and I lose money because of decisions made by the Government, presumably I should be compensated.

**Lisa Nandy:** This is precisely the question that the Government have yet to answer, but we hope that will be forthcoming during this debate. I would add to what the right hon. Gentleman said that the local government pension service is already under a fiduciary duty to take prudent investment decisions based on an assessment of the financial consequence of a number of matters, including environmental and social governance, and when it divests on the basis of non-financial factors, it should follow the Law Commission direction that any financial impact should not be significant and that the decision would likely be supported by scheme members. I am not sure what happens when a local government pension fund is taking decisions that would not be supported by scheme members. We are talking about the pensions of 6 million people in this country, and I think these are important questions that the Government must answer.

I want to turn to one of our chief concerns about this Bill, which is the concentration of the decision making and judgment of hundreds of public bodies in the hands of just one person and the implications of that for some of the most persecuted people in the world. There will be significant effects on the Uyghur in Xinjiang, who are suffering such serious crimes against humanity that the Biden Administration have recognised it as genocide. The Secretary of State will have read the impassioned letter from those groups in *The Times* about the effects of this Bill. Surely we cannot abandon them to their fate. For the Rohingya in Myanmar, for the Tamils in Sri Lanka and for countless others, the concern is that this bad law prevents not just economic action to uphold human rights everywhere, but solidarity with some of the most persecuted people in the world.

As was said earlier, the Bill goes further and clause 7 grants to the Secretary of State or other relevant body the power to issue notices requiring all information to be handed over, if they suspect that a prohibited statement expressing a moral or political view about foreign conduct is in the process of or about to be made, including information in subsection (8) that would normally be protected by legal privilege. Let me clear about the effect of that: this hands over to the Office for Students, the Secretary of State, and the Treasury, greater powers than those available to the security services. I know there are Members on both sides of the House who are deeply troubled by that, and those who are not should consider for a moment how they might feel about this Bill if their party was not in power.

We should not be here. We have long fought for legislation to tackle what is a real problem, and we are determined to give the Government the opportunity to do the right thing. That is why today we are proposing an alternative that allows the Government and this House to keep our promise to tackle a long-standing issue of deep concern to the Jewish community, but avoids tearing up our commitment to human rights, local democracy and free speech, in a Bill that does not even appear to tackle the very problem it seeks to solve.

**Richard Graham:** The hon. Lady has made a number of powerful points. She will have heard me question the Secretary of State about the fact that the Bill is not country agnostic; it is directed primarily at one country and one issue, which is BDS. The question for her is, in a way, the opposite of that, which is that this problem has come to be because of decisions made by Leicester City Council and Lancaster City Council, which are Labour-run councils acting arguably in cahoots with BDS. What does she think the Labour party can do to take away the perceived requirement to have a Bill that seems, at the moment, largely to argue against BDS's actions against Israel?

**Lisa Nandy:** I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman had to say and I support it, but he should please not try to tarnish Labour Members with a record on antisemitism. There are those of us who stood up not just to those who are supposed to be our opponents, but to those who are supposed to be our friends as well. And we will always do that. I give my word, and I give our word on behalf of the Labour party.

As I am about to outline, we have provided the Government with an alternative. Earlier this year we sought to amend the Procurement Bill to ensure that no single country, especially in the cases that we have been describing and the world's only Jewish state, can be singled out for different standards from others, and in doing so whip up hate and hostility against the Jewish community. It is a real problem. We provided the Government with a solution. They refused it, but we remain convinced that co-operation and consensus is the right approach to tackle what we accept is a very real problem.

Today, the Secretary of State will hear this refrain again and again from Members on his own Back Benches, and across the House: two important principles—the need to tackle racism and antisemitism, which are a scourge on our society, and the need to stand up for human rights, freedom of expression, democracy and

our long-standing position on Israel and Palestine, and act in accordance with international law—and those things should never be seen as mutually exclusive or allowed to be pitted against one another.

We have a number of serious suggestions about the way that this problem can be tackled. We have outlined an alternative approach. We have provided the Secretary of State with a solution, and we urge him to take it. Otherwise, he should know that Labour Members will be compelled to vote against the Bill on Third Reading, as I suspect will significant numbers of his own colleagues. It is an outcome we should all strive to avoid. If a pledge to tackle division, around which there is broad consensus, was derailed by a combative approach and a Government who refuse to listen to the wide range of voices that have expressed their concerns, that would be a crying shame. With good will and good faith on the part of the Government, we can proceed together. We have proposed how. The ball is now in the court of the right hon. Gentleman.

6.14 pm

**Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con):** This evening's debate should focus on the specifics of the Bill in front of us. The right of Israel to exist and defend itself is not up for debate. The right of Palestine to exist and defend itself is also not up for debate. The UK supports a two-state solution, and I believe that everyone in the Chamber would also be of that mind. I wish to draw the attention of hon. Members to the implications of the current drafting of the Bill. It has implications on our historic commitments and responsibilities and ability to play the role of honest arbiter within the region, and risks undermining our commitments as a United Nations Security Council member.

My concerns about the Bill fall within four areas: first, foreign policy implications; secondly, exceptionalism in legislation; thirdly, protection of freedom of speech; and finally, the legality of what we are being asked to support. Let me begin with the implications of the Bill on foreign policy and international obligations. My first concern, as was raised in earlier interventions, is the conflation of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Conflating East Jerusalem, the west bank and the Golan Heights breaks with our position, because the UK recognises the Golan Heights as annexed and the west bank and East Jerusalem as Occupied Palestinian Territories. That is a departure from our foreign policy.

Not only does the Bill break with our foreign policy, but clause 3(7) puts the UK in breach of our commitments under UN Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). That is not just an international commitment; it is one that we drafted back in 2016. It states that in their "relevant dealings", states must distinguish

"between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967."

The Bill does not distinguish between our treatment of Israel and the OPTs.

Why does breaching UNSCR 2334 matter? Because we rely on the rules based system to protect ourselves and to protect our allies. How many of us have talked about the rule of law in this Chamber, when it comes to Ukraine and Russia, Serbia, the Balkans, and so many other parts of this world? The impact of the Bill would be significant. It will undermine our position as a respectable and reliable multilateral partner, committed



[*Alicia Kearns*]

to upholding UN Security Council resolutions as we should as a permanent member. It risks our losing the support of Arab states on shared issues, and their vote at the UN. We all know that western states are spending a significant amount of time trying to shore up the support of so-called non-aligned countries. I have spent most of the last few days on the phone to Arab ambassadors—the same Arab ambassadors who recognise Israel and want to normalise relations with Israel. Finally, we risk giving China, Iran, Russia, Serbia and others an easy propaganda win, because they will use this against us when we talk about the annexation of territories around the world.

I am concerned that the UN Special Coordinator would have no choice but to explicitly name the UK in their next report on how member states are adhering to compliance with UNSCR 2334. I also worry that it sends the wrong message about the achievement of sovereignty through violence. It means that if Israel breaches international law in the occupied territories, public bodies cannot express their ethical objection to those crimes. I worry that the Bill will leave the international community questioning whether Israeli settlements in the OPTs and the Golan Heights are still regarded as illegal by the UK Government.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady has given a very good list of people that the Bill could undermine. Does she also recognise that it undermines many people in Israel who oppose the occupation in the occupied territories, and it would make their life harder when making the case in Israel in a democratic sense?

**Alicia Kearns:** I have received significant representations from human rights organisations within Israel, and also from within our Jewish communities in the UK, who feel that this is not only the worst possible timing for the Bill, but that they themselves do not support it.

If we are now to have questioned our position on the OPTs legally, how is the Bill compatible with that, and with the fact that the Conservative Government recognise that settlements built on occupied Palestinian land since 1967 are illegal? We must ensure that all legislation makes a clear distinction between Israel where we support no boycott, and the illegal settlements on occupied land where a boycott would be consistent with our position on UNSCR 2334. Why are we undermining our international position by breaching our position on a two-state solution, and changing the UK's recognition of certain territories as occupied, when the Bill can achieve the same end simply by removing clause 3(7)? The House will hear that point reiterated throughout the evening by many of my colleagues.

I was also concerned that the Secretary of State appeared not to be aware of the concerns emanating from the Foreign Office and from diplomatic posts. I ask him to clarify that when winding up this evening. I think the wording was that “no such advice had been received”. Has the Foreign Office truly not given any advice that it had concerns that the Bill breached our UN Security Council resolutions?

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Does the UK presently have any policies against goods coming in from the settlements?

**Alicia Kearns:** I am not aware whether we do, but that would be legitimate within the current UN Security Council restrictions so I would not necessarily oppose it. What I am saying is that we would not necessarily support Israel being boycotted, but we would support a boycott of products from the occupied territories, because we consider them to be illegal or annexed.

**Dr Whitford:** Is it not an issue to use the term “boycotting” with regard to the settlements? They are illegal under international law, so no public body should be investing in, or making profit from, them.

**Alicia Kearns:** Inherently, the hon. Lady makes a valid point, although it is potentially a different discussion. There is a fundamental question around whether we should be boycotting or bringing in goods. As the House knows, I have been vocal in ensuring that goods coming from genocide are not imported from across China. We must have a standard response across all countries.

To sum up, my concern is that legislation by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities must not depart from our foreign policy, let alone undermine it or leave us ostracised internationally. My second concern is the legislative implications from the exceptionalism proposed in the Bill. Since my election, the Government have been at great pains to make the point to me that all legislation should be agnostic. I must admit that I railed against that when first elected, and the House may have seen me table amendments with the words “China” and “Xinjiang” on repeat—ad nauseam, some might say. However, the Government are correct, and I have come to appreciate and recognise that position.

To demonstrate that point, let me draw on the Procurement Bill, which this Bill interacts with on exceptions, pension schemes and the UK security services. All the amendments that I tabled to the Procurement Bill—I am grateful to the Government for having accepted them—were country-agnostic, because the Government made the point that that is how we legislate, except for such things as trade Bills. We should be agnostic in all we do, but worse than being non-agnostic, the Bill gives exceptional impunity to Israel. We should not give that to any country, and I would be standing here making the same request were any country named.

To act in this way now sends a clear message to all Members of Parliament: “From now on, it is game on. If you want to put China, Xinjiang or any other country into primary legislation, crack on.” The Chief Whip will not be able to tell Members they cannot do it anymore, and Government Ministers will not be able to argue against it any more, because we have done it and broken that practice in this Bill. The Government will regret making this precedent. The reality is that we can achieve the same outcome without putting geographic references into primary legislation.

On the implications for freedom of speech—I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) for having made me aware of how acute these are—the Bill has unjustifiable clauses. Clause 4(1) states that if a local council leader, university vice-chancellor or even the chief executive of a private company delivering public services speaks in a way that contravenes clause 1, they have broken the law. To make the implications clear, the Bill states that just someone

expressing in print that they would like, as an elected official, to boycott products from Xinjiang, China or any illegal settlement but cannot, because the law does not allow them to do so, constitutes an offence punishable by an as yet unlimited fine from the Secretary of State. That is completely inappropriate.

**Joanna Cherry:** The hon. Lady is making a wonderful speech and I agree with everything she has said. On that last point, does she agree that the Bill is likely to disproportionately interfere with freedom of expression and the conscience of individuals, in such a way that does not sit with our obligations under articles 9 and 10 of the ECHR?

**Alicia Kearns:** I entirely agree with the hon. and learned Lady, because this legislation does breach article 10 rights to freedom of speech, as it fails to distinguish between a person and an authority, so individuals risk being liable. If the legislation made clear that it is about public authorities, we would not have those concerns, but the lack of that clarity makes individuals liable to being fined, and therefore it breaches article 10 of the ECHR. Given that the Government have just rightly passed the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which I fundamentally and entirely support, to now stop elected individuals from expressing moral disapproval or even to consider or vocalise ethical investment decisions is wrong.

My final concern is the legality of what we are being asked to support. I question whether this Bill will be legally sound once tested, and I have every reason to think it will not be, because it has previously failed in the High Court. When the measure fails again in the High Court, we will then see a judgment on the UK's treatment of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which I fear I would not be proud to stand behind. Similar legislation has failed, and legal concerns rest around, for example, the terms "political or moral disapproval", which are not defined in the Bill and breach our commitment to making human rights fundamental in our decision making. Our obligations under the UN guiding principles on business and human rights essentially mean that this legislation would see the private sector having greater adherence to our human rights than the public sector. I encourage the Secretary of State to consider potential conflict between the UK Government and the UN stating that settlements are illegal while then penalising local councils in the UK for taking ethical procurement decisions to address that illegality.

There is significant unhappiness among colleagues in the House and in our party. To enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to still deliver on our manifesto commitment, I urge him to please remove clause 3(7), which is unnecessary to delivering on our commitment. We can still do this, with just a small compromise from those on the Front Bench. The Government can still introduce Israel's exception through secondary legislation, which would mean that we would treat Israel as equal to every other state. It would prevent us from breaching our UN Security Council resolutions and from being dragged through the courts. It would maintain our country-agnostic legislative approach, and it would prevent us from undermining our standing internationally.

While we are on the subject, I have never felt that we are so close to conflict, particularly following this morning's news. There is the chance that we might be seeing a

third intifada and the Gaza crisis of 2023, and we need to demonstrate meaningful resolve from King Charles Street in ending the conflict and de-escalating. I therefore urge the Prime Minister to appoint a middle east peace envoy, because we do not have any envoy for the middle east, let alone one focused exclusively on the middle east peace process. We should be worried, because what happens in Palestine and Israel impacts around the world. I stress that this low-commitment ask would allow us to live up to our responsibilities and demonstrate meaningful resolve. With that, I join with other respected friends of Israel in urging the Government to think again.

6.27 pm

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the excellent speech of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns). I also thank the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for suggesting that tone in this debate is important. I see that the Secretary of State is leaving at this moment in time, but I do not think anybody will miss the irony of his projecting himself as the sole moral arbiter for the whole United Kingdom. Even worse, he seeks to quell the just protests of honourable organisations and individuals who are trying to bring about decent change internationally.

In Scotland, we have a proud history of promoting social justice, human rights and respect for international law on the world stage. As the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) alluded to in his intervention, Scotland can provide a very good example. In 1981, the then Glasgow District Council decided to award Nelson Mandela the freedom of the city—the first city in the world to do so. Five years later, St George's Place in Glasgow city centre was renamed Nelson Mandela Place. Why was that? It was because the South African consulate was in St George's Place, and the council wanted to make sure that everybody knew who Nelson Mandela was by making sure his name was on the address of the South African consulate. When Nelson Mandela addressed Glasgow City Chambers in 1993, he said:

"While we were physically denied our freedom in the country of our birth, a city, 6,000 miles away, and as renowned as Glasgow, refused to accept the legitimacy of the apartheid system, and declared us to be free."

Had this proposed legislation been in place during the 1980s, Glasgow would have likely been legally debarred from taking the actions that it did, or even from suggesting that it might take those actions, because the then Conservative Government did not support sanctions for South Africa. I remember as a young lad seeing country after country boycotting the Commonwealth games in Edinburgh in 1986 as a result of the then UK Government's actions.

SNP Members will be supporting Labour's reasoned amendment. However, it is missing one key part: the attacks on the devolved Administrations. Perversely, the democratically elected Parliament and Government of Scotland will be required under the Bill to give legislative assent to its enactment. We will be asked to provide the gag that silences our freedom of expression and that of the people we represent.

As a good global citizen, Scotland is committed to the highest ethical and moral standards in human rights, climate justice, workers' rights and economic development. The Scottish Government will always fulfil their obligations under international law and agreements. The people of

[Chris Stephens]

Scotland rightly expect that actions in Scotland should be taken with full consideration of moral and ethical duties to communities around the world, and we will not idly watch that good work being constrained.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's points. The Welsh Labour Government have policies on such matters as modern slavery and human rights. Public sector investment and procurement are devolved, yet the Bill's impact assessment does not consider any specific Welsh approaches. Does he agree that the Government should do that before taking any further steps?

**Chris Stephens:** Indeed. There was probably no discussion with the devolved Administrations on the Bill and the impact that it will have on the devolved institutions, so I agree with my hon. Friend. The UK Government claim that the Scottish Government pursue actions that undermine UK foreign policy, but that is simply not the case—it is not true. For many years, the Scottish Government have conducted international engagement which benefits the people of Scotland and aligns with present constitutional arrangements. Scottish Government Ministers are simply embodying the values-based principles of the Scottish electorate, as the Welsh would do with the Welsh electorate.

I listened to the Secretary of State arguing for the Bill, which gave an impression of what the death rattle of a dying Government sounds like. The Bill represents a desperate attempt by the UK Government to salvage something from the wreckage they have created across the fields of international trade, diplomatic relations and human rights. Let us look at those fields in turn.

**Dr Whitford:** Does not the gagging clause in the Bill, which will stifle debate and discussion about policy, fit with what we have seen in the last year or so with the Public Order Act 2023: the seizing by the Executive of almost every power to hold the Government to account, whether from the judiciary, voters, protesters or even MPs, through post-Brexit legislation?

**Chris Stephens:** Let me add trade unions and workers who decide to take strike action. Yes, we know who the Government's enemies are because they have been legislating against them in the last year since they crashed the economy.

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): In Nottingham, we have significant numbers of people, including Hongkongers and those from other parts of the world, who have fled from many countries perpetrating human rights abuses. They rightly do not want their councils or universities to be complicit in human rights abuses that their family and friends continue to experience. Does the hon. Member agree that public bodies must have the right to take a principled stance against, for example, the persecution of the people of Hong Kong, the Uyghurs in Xinjiang or political dissidents across China?

**Chris Stephens:** I do agree. I am going to quote an exchange between the hon. Lady and a Minister later in my remarks, so she may want to intervene again. I have

Uyghur Muslims as constituents. I know how serious the issues are. I have Kurdish constituents who are very concerned about the oppression of Kurdish people in Turkey and Syria, for example. I will always stand beside those people, but the Bill will prevent public bodies and institutions from taking such steps. That is a real concern.

The Government are leaving themselves open to a new slogan: never mind the probity, feel the width. Their ability to grow trade is now severely constrained, so they seem to be selling off their own principles to the highest bidder. Previous attempts to work with others in making the world a decent place are now to be put aside. Rogue nations are to be tolerated for the sake of business and their transgressions ignored. The Bill—the dog's breakfast that it is—leaves them open to that charge.

Amnesty International UK is right to say that the Bill will

“make it almost impossible for public bodies to use their procurement and investment policies to incentivise ethical business conduct that is human rights compliant.”

However, perhaps the objective is not surprising. From the UK being an original drafter of the European convention on human rights, I note that some on the Government Benches now wish the UK to leave that. We would have hoped that the Conservative Government might have learned from their disastrous policy of giving succour to the apartheid regime in South Africa. When the world railed against that regime, the then Conservative Government turned a blind eye, even though we already knew the consequences of appeasement from earlier experiences.

We have learned in the last century what happens when Governments do not have a conscience and turn a blind eye to wrongdoing. We have learned that responsibility lies not just at a national level but at a local level—and, yes, even at the level of the individual. Now we are informed that giving expression to that conscience locally will be penalised under the law. It would appear that the only good conscience is a Tory conscience as expressed by a Government Minister at Westminster.

I ask myself: why are the Government pursuing this policy? Does every Government Member want to stifle local democracy? Every society has its share of people who are mainly self-interested, with little concern for those outside their own circle. It would be good to think that that proportion of society has shrunk as we have become more aware of world affairs. But it still seems to be far too substantial, suggesting to niche voters that principles are costly to us and we cannot now afford them. That is a dangerous game. It is much easier to break down society than to build it up; to make people isolationist rather than internationalist. Patching that fragmented society together again would be a monumental task. But there is good news: there are some parts of the United Kingdom where that dystopian dream is not being pursued—quite the opposite, in fact.

We have had helpful support in our position regarding Israel, for example. On Thursday, at that very Dispatch Box, the International Trade Minister told the House that the UK has a clear position on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories:

“they are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and...a two-state solution.”—[*Official Report*, 29 June 2023; Vol. 735, c. 408.]



As set out in Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office guidance on overseas business risks, there are clear risks to UK businesses related to economic and financial activities in the settlements and we do not encourage or offer support to such activity. So the Government's position seems to be, "Don't do it. We don't support it, but we're not going to allow people to boycott it." That is a very confusing position for the Government to find themselves in. The Secretary of State suggested that the Bill does not stop boycotts of occupied territories, but actually we need just to read the Bill to see that that is exactly what it proposes.

**Andrew Percy:** Will the hon. Member give way?

**Chris Stephens:** I will in a second.

I want to make it clear that the Scottish Government and the SNP unequivocally condemn and distance themselves from members or affiliates in the BDS movement who advocate a complete boycott of Israel and Israeli people and who suggest that the state of Israel does not even have the right to exist. The Scottish Government are also committed to tackling all incidents of hate crime, working in partnership with a range of organisations, including Police Scotland. It would be a cruel distraction for the Government to equate sympathy and support for oppressed people with antisemitism. The Bill leads to the accusation that the Government think there are good and bad occupations. As others have said, when I have Uyghur Muslim constituents with children in camps, I cannot support and vote for a Bill that would stop organisations from campaigning against or boycotting Chinese goods on the basis of the treatment of Uyghur Muslims. With Kurdish constituents, I cannot support a Bill that would stop me, or organisations or public bodies, from boycotting goods from Turkey or Syria on the basis of the oppression of Kurdish people. I cannot support a Bill that ignores environmental concerns. Friends of the Earth said that the Bill will

"prevent public bodies from divesting from fossil fuel, as well as diverting their money away from inadvertently funding human rights abuses abroad".

That is what the Bill does. It will make it illegal for public bodies and local authorities to divest from or boycott fossil fuel companies and those with poor track records on protecting environmental standards.

The Scottish National party—and I believe, the Scottish people—will not participate in this diminution of freedom of speech and disregard for the wellbeing of our friends throughout the world. Earlier, I referred to the Bill as the death rattle of a dying Government. Ministers really should withdraw the Bill; it is a complete and utter dog's breakfast. If they do not, I support the Opposition's reasoned amendment and the Bill does not deserve to pass Second Reading.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** A large number of right hon. and hon. are trying to catch my eye. If we are to get everyone in, my guidance is that speeches should be limited to about six minutes.

6.41 pm

**Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):** I agree with much of the sentiment of the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), for whom

I have a great deal of regard, as she knows. However, fine words butter no parsnips. It is easy to identify the source of the problem, but it is a little more difficult to legislate in such a complex area.

I would respond to some of the things that the hon. Lady said on two fronts. First, it is okay for people to make reference to the political views and other writings of a KC who is advising her and her right hon. and hon. Friends. That is a perfectly legitimate thing to bring to the House's attention. King's counsels are not Gods and they are not beyond any criticism. Secondly, she made the point, in many ways, for why we require the Bill—specifically, clause 3(7). She highlighted her own work—for which I applaud her—during a very difficult time in her party's history. She stood up and received all sorts of appalling abuse because of the position she was prepared to take on what was going on in her party. I am grateful for and impressed by her bravery in doing that. It was an incredible thing for Opposition Members to do at that time. Precisely because we ended up in the position we did, where people with sympathies for the BDS campaign came very close to power in this country, we require clause 3(7) and the specification of Israel.

BDS is an antisemitic, racist campaign—there is no doubt about that. It singles out the state of Israel for special treatment. There is something peculiarly sinister about those who obsess about Israel while being blind to the behaviour of despots and dictators across the world. I hope that is not the case for most Members in the House, but it is for some who oppose this view. That is not my view, but that of the German Parliament, the Bundestag, which passed a motion a few years ago that stated that the actions of the BDS were reminiscent of the terrifying Nazi campaign against Jewish people under Adolf Hitler. It went on to say:

"The 'don't buy' stickers of the BDS movement on Israeli products"

could be associated with

"the Nazi call 'don't buy from Jews' and other corresponding graffiti...on shop windows".

I would hope that none in the Chamber would support those sorts of actions or behaviours. It is a little off subject, but today we learned that the last French D-day fighter of Nazism Léon Gautier has passed away. It would be nice for us to remember his name today.

Sadly, that behaviour rooted in the Nazi period has not passed. We have seen so many examples of it, as Members have reminded us this afternoon. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) for reminding me of some experiences of his constituents in recent years. I will not repeat them due to time constraints, but they include the removal of kosher products because of the pernicious, racist BDS movement and the fact that film festivals in this country have been cancelled because they dared to take a small amount of sponsorship from the Israeli embassy.

The BDS campaign has consequences. It is no wonder a Jewish driver was attacked in Golders Green outside Kosher Kingdom for daring to have an Israeli flag on his vehicle. It is no wonder we end up with the appalling antisemitic incidents and attacks on British campuses. British Jews become the targets and victims of the campaign—none of us should forget that. We cannot divorce BDS from its impacts on the Jewish citizens of our country.

[Andrew Percy]

We have seen record numbers of antisemitic incidents in recent years—it is important to remind the House of those. Last year, 1,652 antisemitic incidents were recorded by the Community Security Trust. Worryingly, the proportion of victims who were minors has increased. Perhaps even worse, the proportion of minors perpetrating those attacks has also increased; in 2022, 20% were recorded as minors—a number that has doubled in recent years. We must do everything we can to abate the trend among younger people, some of which is motivated by the BDS campaign. Every time there is a flare-up in the middle east conflict, British Jews are on the receiving end. The current issues, which the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) referenced, of rising tensions in the regions are the biggest argument for the legislation in the form in which it has been produced.

Any rise in tensions in the middle east will result in an uptick in BDS activities. I was interested in what the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), said on that. He was careful to say, “Of course, we disassociate ourselves from people in the BDS movement who delegitimise the state of Israel through boycotts.” However, he did not tell us his view of those people when they argue for boycotts in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or in the settlements. The problem is that they are not different people, but the same. He cannot separate them from the people seeking to delegitimise Israel, and say, “Those people are wrong, and racist and antisemitic”, as many in the BDS movement are, and then infer, as I think he was doing, that their activities and what they demand are okay when they relate to other parts. They are the same people who hold the same pernicious, racist views.

Many people with issues about the Bill have legitimate concerns—there is no doubt about that. The Secretary of State said at the Dispatch Box that he was prepared to work in Committee to see how we can improve the Bill if required. That was a sensible thing to say. However, I am afraid that for some who oppose the Bill, it is always about Israel. Their beef is always the state of Israel. I have heard some bizarre arguments against the Bill, one of which is that it will increase antisemitism. That is a strange argument, to put it mildly. Just because some people do not like the legislation, saying that it might result in an increase in antisemitism and “Oh, in which case, let’s not bother with it” rather proves the point of the Bill.

**Richard Graham** *rose*—

**Andrew Percy:** I will give way, because I like my hon. Friend.

**Richard Graham:** It is not really about liking each other, important though that is. It is about what the *Jewish Chronicle* itself has said:

“Boycotting Israel is wrong but this anti BDS bill is not the answer... This is a bad bill... and bad especially for British Jews”.

Is my hon. Friend aware of that, and does he realise that many Jews are not in favour of this way of trying to protect themselves from antisemitism?

**Andrew Percy:** The editor-at-large of the *Jewish Chronicle*, in an excellent piece today, wrote:

“There is no room for shades of grey here. You either think it’s fine to boycott Jews—in which case you will oppose the Bill—or you don’t, in which case you will support it.”

I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, which rather helpfully takes me on to my point about the view of the Jewish community: the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council are united in believing that the Bill is invaluable in the battle against antisemitism.

I was responding to some of the opposition to the Bill. One issue is that of settlements. The Bill will have no impact on the UK’s policy on settlements, which is that they are illegal under international law. That does not change with the Bill. The country does not, at the moment, have a boycott policy against settlement products or products coming from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, precisely because it is so complex in terms of who actually works there and who is damaged economically. The Bill makes no difference to that and neither does it prevent any criticism of Israel. That can continue and we have heard that today. I end where I started: this legislation is necessary to deal with a pernicious and peculiarly sinister antisemitic campaign group.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. I remind colleagues that I said six minutes, as opposed to 10. If colleagues could stick to that, that would be helpful.

6.51 pm

**Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab):** I am afraid I completely disagree with the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy). The Bill reflects what is wrong in politics today.

The Government have put forward legislation that is flawed, poorly drafted, and will have damaging consequences both here and abroad. They have not done it to support Israel, to demonstrate solidarity with the Jewish community, or to show they really care about undermining the BDS movement. They simply want to set a political trap for Labour. By putting their crude party political interests above the public interest, they confirm what voters think about us: that politicians waste time on childish political games rather than trying to make the world a better place. It is that behaviour that leads to a loss of trust. The Bill is not a considered attempt to bring about peace, provide better security for Israel or respond to the threats posed by BDS. It is about using Jews as a pawn in the Government’s political game. To debate the Bill on the day that violence has flared up again in the west bank is a solemn reminder of why this really matters. I say to the Government: our voters have had enough of that sort of politics, and so have I.

Like many who oppose this legislation, I am a proud Zionist. I oppose the divisive and at times antisemitic BDS campaigns. I will always fight antisemitism, whenever and wherever it rears its ugly head. Action is needed, but the Bill will do more harm than good. So what is wrong with it? First, it singles out Israel. Many supporters of Israel rightly feel that hostile campaigners single out the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that the same level of attack is not meted out to Myanmar, for example, or to

China for its treatment of the Uyghurs. The Bill plays into the hands of antisemites by doing the one thing we should never, ever do: single out Israel as the one place that can never be boycotted. No other country is named. If the Bill is passed, I fear—and know from my own post box—that it will have the unintended consequence of increasing anti-Jew hatred in Britain. We have seen the letter to the Prime Minister from Uyghur exiles opposing the Bill, because it will affect them and make it impossible to boycott goods from China. What thought have the Government given to ethical concerns that public bodies may have about, for instance, the Ugandan Government and their treatment of the LGBT community? By singling out Israel, the Bill pits the mainstream Jewish community against every other valiant human rights campaign, and does so in a way and at a time that will make peace in the region more difficult.

I returned recently from Israel, where I saw the chaos being wrought by the extreme actions of the present Government. From undermining democracy with attacks on judicial independence to the untrammelled expansion of settlements in the occupied territories, Israel has never been more divided and Israeli politics has never felt more broken. The best thing Britain can do is to put diplomatic pressure on the Israeli Government to abandon the judicial reforms and de-escalate the violence. The Bill will deliver the complete opposite. It will be heralded by the Netanyahu Government as a ringing endorsement of their actions. It will send the wrong message at the wrong time.

Like others, I reject the approach of BDS to Israel. Its actions encourage hatred between communities and too often its supporters are antisemitic in what they say. Wrongdoing is never defeated by stifling free speech and open debate, and that is what the Bill does. It prohibits elected public officers from even making statements suggesting that they support boycotts in any state. Clause 4 is a gagging clause, and arguments are never won by suppressing democratic debate. I learnt that fighting the British National party in the 2010 general election. I did not beat Nick Griffin by refusing to engage with him. It was by engaging publicly, by his appearance on “Question Time”, and by allowing him free speech that we exposed what a vile, divisive, racist party he led. Unmasking him through debate helped us to smash him at the ballot box. The Government have just legislated to enshrine free speech in our universities, but are now cancelling the freedom of elected officials in this grubby little Bill. Were they really committed to tackling the BDS problem, they would support our reasoned amendment which would ensure that decisions public authorities took on procurement and investment would be consistently applied to all countries. Israel would not be singled out.

I spent years as a councillor. The idea that local politicians should not express views on either national or international issues is deeply arrogant. We stand for public office because of our political principles, and that is true whether one is a back-bench councillor or a Cabinet Minister. The idea that the two elected positions differ in their democratic status is plain wrong. It is a typical, hugely centralising move by the Government that puts yet another nail in the coffin of devolution. On those grounds alone, the Bill should be opposed. I was in local government when anti-apartheid was a strong movement. Our council joined many others to

boycott South Africa. Margaret Thatcher opposed those boycotts in the name of economic liberalism and introduced legislation in 1988 similar to that proposed today. As we now know, that legislation proved ineffective, but the Government seem incapable of learning the lessons of history.

I urge Members to support the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy). It provides a fair and pragmatic response to the potential damage that BDS could bring to Israel. The Minister may claim to be promoting the Bill in the name of our community, but it fails to protect or advance the interests of the Jewish community: it promotes community discord rather than encouraging community cohesion; it encourages conflict rather than inspiring peace; it cancels free speech rather than promoting democratic debate; it is another centralising move at the expense of localism; and it provides support for the extremist actions of the present Israeli Government, rather than using our influence to express our concerns and calm things down in the middle east. It is a bad, bad Bill. As one of the few Jews on the Opposition Benches, as a committed Zionist and as someone who stands with my community in desperately wanting a peace in the region that brings security to Israel, I ask the Government: please think again.

6.59 pm

**Sir Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I thank the Government for bringing forward this important Bill. In my former role as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I took the Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Act 2022 through the House, and that marked the first legislative step against BDS. It was a landmark moment, legally enforcing the principle that BDS has no place in the investment decisions of local authorities. I strongly welcome our fulfilling our manifesto commitment to extend that principle.

Put simply, local authorities have no business running a foreign policy parallel to that of His Majesty's Government. That remit is absolutely within our gift, not theirs. Their role is to deliver local services for the communities they represent, to innovate and to deliver best value. I say that as someone who is a convinced believer in devolution. I believe that we should empower mayors to lead areas of the country in a way that will unlock their economic potential, but I do not want them opining on the rights and wrongs of the behaviour of different countries. It is emphatically unhelpful for local authorities to hinder our country's export trade, damage our foreign relations and act in a way that is to the detriment of our international or economic security.

Much of the specific concern in this debate is about Israel, and that is because it is always about Israel. This is the point that we cannot elide and that sits at the heart of the reason why Israel needs to be mentioned on the face of the Bill. There are Members arguing against Israel being named specifically in this Bill for whom I have great respect and whom I count as personal friends. But we cannot be oblivious to why Israel needs this protection. The overwhelming focus of the BDS movement is, of course, on this one small state. The BDS movement is not arguing against the horrors perpetrated in Russia, China, Iran or any number of other countries—we could list for hours those countries that perpetrate grotesque wrongs against their people—and I do not see local authorities acting against those countries, either.



[Sir Simon Clarke]

I see them acting consistently against our ally Israel. There can be no doubt, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) said, that the motivation of some in the BDS movement is dark, sinister and unashamedly linked to the antisemitism that we have seen in our society over recent years, perhaps particularly and most shamefully in our universities. It is disgusting and it is hard not to see aspects of it in the attempt to enforce some of these boycotts and divestments. They simply have no place in modern Britain. It is right that we should act against this and remind local government of its proper responsibilities, which are large and growing under this Government. I certainly believe that that should be its focus.

I come to this debate without any significant minority community in my constituency. I simply see a wrong that we should right, an offence that we should not give, and money, energy and time that our local authorities should be spending to better effect on their significant responsibilities. Foreign affairs should be left to this place, not to town halls.

7.2 pm

**Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): It is an honour to rise to oppose this Bill in the strongest possible terms. I was very disappointed in how the Bill was presented by the Secretary of State, who left his place without even listening to other Front-Bench speeches. I was incredibly encouraged, however, by the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), who gave a reasoned and constructive speech, and, of course, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge). She comes to these issues from a different place from me, but I agreed with every word she said.

I want to cover three main areas: the unprecedented powers that the Bill gives the Secretary of State and, by implication, the removal of balanced decision making from those in local government who have been elected to serve their local communities; the incompatibility of the Bill with international law and the conflation of the UK's long-standing cross-party position in respect of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights with the state of Israel; and the exposure of the UK Government to extended and repeated legal challenge, which would take away money that, as the right hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Sir Simon Clarke) said, needs to be spent in our local communities.

Let me go through those three points. The Government have often stated their commitment to devolution, and they have delivered it in many areas, allowing as much decision making as possible to take place near the people whom politicians are elected to serve. This Bill flies in the face of that claim. It will act as a gagging order on local authorities in a way that no other piece of legislation does. Many in local government have raised huge concerns about the impact of the Bill, including the *Local Government Chronicle*, the Local Government Association and the TUC. Particular concerns have been raised about the Bill's impact on the 6 million local government pensioners. Is that really the Government's intention? The Bill will ban public bodies—mainly local authorities but also universities and others—from working

within current procurement rules and making their own decisions appropriate to their own areas. If we look to history to inform the future, we will see that the most effective example in my lifetime was the successful campaign against the apartheid regime in South Africa. That undoubtedly helped bring down that regime and led to democracy in South Africa, which is something that the international community and the UK should be proud of. Are we really suggesting that we should not be allowed to take such a position again?

I turn to the Bill's incompatibility with international law and the UK's long-standing cross-party position in respect of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights, which are being conflated with the state of Israel. Why does the Bill highlight those three areas? On the face of it, it looks as though the Secretary of State wishes to penalise councils that have acted not against the state of Israel but against illegal settlements built on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in flagrant defiance of successive UN Security Council resolutions, which the UK helped draft and voted in favour of. It seems to me that the UK Government are throwing all sense to the wind. We all wish to see this part of the world living in peace. The violence that has erupted today is an example of how crucial it is to bring peace to this area. The failure to distinguish between the sovereign territory of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967, as outlined in UN Security Council resolution 2334, is an alarming deviation from the long-standing UK policy. I ask the Secretary of State to look again and remove the most contentious parts of the Bill. Those who push this Bill make a very dangerous conflation between legitimate criticism of illegal Israeli actions and the horror of antisemitism, which we all abhor.

Finally, and briefly—I am going to stick to the time limit—this Bill, if it goes through in its current state, will result in an appalling waste of money. It will undoubtedly lead to not one, not two but numerous legal challenges, with each costing the Government, and therefore the British taxpayer, an enormous amount of money. In the current economic climate, throwing things to the wind and rushing headlong into such a Bill, which does not solve the problem that it sets out to solve, is absolutely irresponsible in the first degree. I ask the Government to either look again and remove the contentious clauses, or start again and bring to the House a Bill that actually does what it sets out to do and that sorts out the problem and does not cause utter chaos in this area of policy making.

7.8 pm

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): I rise with a heavy heart to agree with many comments from across the House on the nature of this defective Bill. I agree with Richard Hermer KC, who in a very compelling interview published in today's *Jewish News* talks about the problems that this Bill presents not just for the UK as a whole but for British Jewry in general.

Taking things in order, my primary concern is the safety of that community. As somebody who has worked very closely with the Jewish community, particularly in the capital over the years, and who has a strong affection for the Haredi community in north London, whom I know well both in policing and crime terms and having dealt with their housing issues as Housing Minister, I am afraid that I agree with the right hon. Member for

Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) that this Bill, should it go through in its current form, is likely to damage and worsen their safety rather than improve it. In that I am with Jonathan Freedland, who wrote in the *Jewish Chronicle* just last week:

“What is the favourite refrain of the antisemites? That Israel is the one country you’re not ‘allowed’ to criticise. This bill takes a canard and, in the case of boycotts, turns it into the law of the land.”

The inclusions of clause 3(7) and, indeed, parts of clause 4 send a chill through that sense of debate, and will feed some of the disgusting conspiracy theories about the status of Israel and the influence that that country has around the globe. I have to say that I fear for the safety of the Jewish community should the measures be passed in that form. There are those who would do its members harm—we all know that in this House, and I have seen it for myself—and we cannot give them succour by falling into that trap.

My second concern is the practical impact of the Bill on many organisations across the country. As we heard from the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott), this is a lawyers’ charter. There will be challenges to and fro, involving universities, pension funds and councils. Every decision that is taken will be scrutinised, and, moreover, councillors who have strong convictions in either direction will seek to find ways that are oblique to fulfil their own sense of moral or ethical obligation. There are groups out there who represent other countries, such as China and Myanmar, who will seek constantly to push councils in their direction, and not just in terms of Israel or Palestine. As a result, a huge amount of money and effort, and KCs at dawn, will be expended in pursuit of this legislation, and the impact will be enormous.

Thirdly, two key fundamental issues that are intrinsic to the way we live in the United Kingdom are challenged by the Bill. The first is, obviously, the free-speech challenge to which a number of Members have already referred, and which is represented in clause 4(2). It appears that I cannot even criticise this law, whether I am a council leader, a university vice-chancellor, or the chief executive of a company that is performing public services. I have never before seen legislation that outlaws disagreement with the law, and I think that breaching that right to free speech is a very problematic step.

The second of these issues was mentioned by the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy). A law granting powers greater than those granted to the police to the investigatory or enforcement authorities identified in the Bill—the Secretary of State, the Office for Students, and one or two others—and allowing them, in particular, to breach legal privilege so that organisations can effectively go on a fishing trip looking at the legal advice that individuals have taken as they contemplate investment decisions is a Rubicon that I believe it would be wrong to cross.

The fourth area that concerns me relates to our tradition of pluralism in this country. There is no doubt that the Bill will send a chill through debate about a series of conflicts across the world. Whether we are talking about the Uyghur Muslims in China, the fate of Hong Kong Chinese or, indeed, those in Israel and Palestine, the fact is that everyone who is engaged in democracy, locally or on a devolved-nation basis, will have to be extremely careful about what they say. They will

have to think twice and three times before they discuss these issues, lest that should prejudice, or be seen to prejudice, an investment or other decision that they may make in the future.

This is especially problematic in the context of academic freedom. As we heard from the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), we have just passed a law to guarantee academic freedom: freedom on campus. For that freedom now to be restricted, particularly for those in leadership positions in universities, strikes me as perverse. It should come as no surprise that the Union of Jewish Students is flatly opposed to the Bill, which is apposite given that its members are often the people most exposed to antisemitism in this form.

Finally, I want to raise the issue of timing. The right hon. Member for Barking said that this was the worst Bill at the worst time; I think that it is a defective Bill at a dreadful time. Given what is unfolding in Israel and Palestine today, given the toll of deaths that we have seen so far this year on all sides and given the international concern about the escalating violence in that part of the world, the introduction of this Bill at a time when many countries in that region are extremely concerned about what is going on will be seen by Arab countries in particular—although Members may not feel this themselves—as being partial, and as privileging one country over the others. I think that that will be detrimental not just to our interests in the United Kingdom, which are a primary concern, but to the interests of Israel, Palestine and the wider region.

7.15 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow another excellent speech dissecting what is wrong with this very faulty Bill. What a contrast it was with the Secretary of State’s opening speech, which was effectively a display of polemical and performative rhetoric, containing assertions that the Bill itself contradicts—and I think that was a shame.

We have benefited from some extremely good analysis, although I have not been able to read all the briefings on the Bill that we have received, not just from eminent KCs—it was, again, a shame to witness one of them being speared by the Secretary of State—but from some leading expert organisations in the field: from the Council for Arab-British Understanding, from our former colleague Richard Burden, from the Balfour Project, from many Jewish organisations including Yachad and the Union of Jewish Students, from many trade unions, and from environmental groups who believe they will be caught up in this as well. I do not think that is what the Secretary of State intended; I think he intended the Bill to appeal to a populist narrative; but I do not think that has happened. Perhaps it is the revenge of the experts whom he trashed so publicly years ago.

While it is good that the Bill is not being given a platform and is not acting in the way in which the Government would like it to act—the way in which all the other legislation they are introducing seems to act at the moment—that does not mean that it is not a dangerous Bill. It does not mean that there is no harm in its provisions: harm to civil society, the rule of law and freedom of speech, principles that the Secretary of State would doubtless say that he wishes to uphold.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

I am pleased to say that the nature and number of the risks in the Bill have been helpfully set out by the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), in the reasoned amendment, and I commend her for an excellent piece of drafting that really takes the Bill to pieces. I hope it will be approved tonight, because it would deny the Bill a Second Reading. If it does not succeed, some Members may vote against Second Reading, while others may abstain. I will abstain at that point, because I am reassured by the shadow Secretary of State's assurance that if the Bill is not substantially reformed in the way in which the amendment suggests, it will be rejected. I hope it will be rejected by Members in all parts of the House on Third Reading, before it leaves this place.

In the very limited time available to me, I want to headline my concerns. The first question I want to ask is this: will the Bill help or hinder groups that are under threat around the world, such as the Uyghurs, the Rohingya, minorities in countries, or people in occupied territories—in Western Sahara, Northern Cyprus, Crimea, or the Palestinian territories? Will it help them in any way? The answer is, I think, a clear no. The Bill will run contrary to international law, it will run contrary to United Nations Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334, and it will run contrary to the due diligence and fiduciary duties of local authorities and other public bodies and to legal principles. The FCDO guidance has already been quoted, and we have heard what Ministers have said as recently as last week in making distinctions between our policy towards Israel and our policy towards the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This point has been made a number of times already. By treating Israel exceptionally, the Bill does it no favours. By treating the Occupied Palestinian Territories alongside Israel, in a way that I have not seen before and that runs contrary to Government policy over many years under different Governments, the Bill makes a significant break and gives comfort to those who wish to see the Palestinian territories under permanent occupation, including many within the extremist Government in Israel.

Whatever the Secretary of State says, the Bill is a clear attack on free speech, and it is quite Kafkaesque in how it denies people the ability to speak out against what is happening. By inflicting not only strong powers of search and seizure but unlimited fines and penalties on those who speak out, this really is appalling legislation.

The Bill will have a chilling effect. We do not need to analyse the exact effect on every procurement and investment decision to see that pension funds are conservative bodies that will take decisions in ways that do not lay them open to this very woolly legislation. The consequence is that they will make bad decisions that go much further than the Secretary of State says he wishes to take the Bill.

Finally, I speak up, as many Members do, for the Palestinian people. How does this Bill benefit them? What effect will it have? On a day in which battlefield weapons are being used against civilian areas of the west bank for the first time in decades, we are talking about this scurrilous and performative Bill. The occupied territories have been occupied since 1967. Who will champion, as I wish this Government and this country

would, their right to self-determination and their right to have their country recognised as a sovereign state, as we absolutely respect for the people of Israel? This Bill only hampers ambitions along those lines.

For those reasons, I ask Members on both sides of the House to vote for the reasoned amendment and not to allow the Bill to pass from this House in its current form.

7.21 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): I also have grave reservations about this Bill. I want to be clear that it is not exclusively about Israel and Palestine; it is about the mandate and responsibility of elected figures in the UK. It is also about contradictions in policy.

On the one hand, we have legislated to protect freedom of speech in universities, but this Bill will prevent universities from discussing the impact of foreign Governments' behaviour on their activities. The Bill is wide in scope but confused in its relationship to the Government's aims as a whole. For instance, clause 1 is worded so that territories recognised as illegally occupied by international law are still within scope, wherever in the world they are. It seeks to prevent public bodies, such as local councils, from

“being influenced by political or moral disapproval of foreign states when taking certain economic decisions”.

In fact, those public bodies may well simply be having regard to international law or the previously expressed opinions of His Majesty's Government.

Clause 4 addresses how a person intends to act. This means that elected officials with serious responsibilities cannot even have a public discussion about how they are affected by the behaviour of overseas states. A prohibition on publishing means it is impossible to have a discussion at a hustings, in the media or in response to questions about human rights.

As we have heard, the Bill is likely to end up in court, either in the way that Prigozhin tried to muzzle journalists in the UK or, conversely, by someone asserting that their article 10 rights under the ECHR have been breached. The Bill curbs free speech and the free exercise of responsibility for elected bodies whose mandate we should respect.

The Bill's wording implies that, among office holders, only Ministers can express an opinion on the countries that should be exempted under clause 3. This means that people in other tiers of government with responsibilities within the scope of clause 2 cannot. No matter how bad a country's human rights record or respect for international law, discussion or action will be prevented.

That brings me on to Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the occupied Golan Heights. Why have they been singled out in clause 3(7)? Like my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), I do not believe this is helpful.

Jonathan Freedland wrote in *The Jewish Chronicle* of his concern that the Bill will make antisemitism worse, because banning the consideration of the economic consequences of things that are happening in the occupied territories, and issuing financial penalties where consideration is given, will just cause resentment. As he says, the best way to bring about change is to engage and debate.



I disagree with some BDS advocates, such as the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Israel has every right to exist, and its people have a right to live in peace. However, where Israel breaches international law, others must be permitted to point this out and hold it to account. This Bill would prevent that.

The Bill mentions the OPTs and the Golan Heights. Does this mean that boycotting the settlements will be against the law? These settlements are illegal under international law, and the UK Government's own website states that there are

"clear risks related to economic... activities in the settlements, and we do not encourage or offer support to such activity... UK citizens and businesses should be aware of the potential reputational implications of getting involved in economic and financial activities in settlements, as well as possible abuses of the rights of individuals. Those contemplating any economic or financial involvement in settlements should seek appropriate legal advice."

Israel benefits economically from its illegal occupation, and we should be permitted to comment and consider it in our policies.

The Foreign Secretary's joint statement with Australia and Canada on 1 July shows the concern about the rapidly increasing number of new settlements on the west bank. How can public bodies show their concern, and why can they not show that concern by not buying goods from settlements or by choosing to buy Palestinian goods instead? Surely this is why we are a free country.

Disagreeing with the policies of the Israeli Government has nothing to do with antisemitism. After all, many Israelis disagree with their own Government. This Bill will not promote community cohesion but do the opposite, opening more divisions. Like others, I fear it may be detrimental to the British Jewish community. I hope this Bill will be substantially changed in Committee and beyond, because I do not understand why we need it.

7.26 pm

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): This poorly drafted Bill will have far-reaching consequences for the UK's protection and promotion of human rights overseas. I extend my thanks to the coalition of 70 civil society and justice organisations that have expressed strong concerns about this Bill and how it will outlaw a powerful tactic of dissent and freedom of expression that has been used throughout history to achieve social change.

I rise to oppose this Bill and to support our reasoned amendment that would decline to give it a Second Reading. What is at stake today should deeply concern every Member of this House. The Bill risks significantly undermining support for groups around the world that are facing persecution and international human rights violations. Labour steadfastly supports a negotiated diplomatic settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on two states, and opposes the expansion of illegal settlements, settler violence, evictions and demolitions. But how realistic is that when an Israeli national security Minister has pledged to "crush" Palestinians "one by one"?

Let us not forget that boycott campaigns have existed right across the political spectrum and have long been used as peaceful and principled tools to fight oppression and injustice. They are a form of protest that should be protected in a democratic society. Last year, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities asked councils to divest from Russia following the illegal invasion of Ukraine, and he clearly recognised councils'

economic importance and that moral considerations should inform what they do, so why can they not be trusted to make their own choices now?

This Bill is so broad and destructive that it will completely prevent public bodies from taking responsible and ethical decisions in relation to human rights abuses in their investment and procurement decisions. Although the Secretary of State argues that there are safeguards in the Bill, he knows they will do nothing to limit the damage this Bill will cause.

I am proud to represent the city of Liverpool, a city that has never faltered in its solidarity with international liberation struggles. In the 1980s, when the African National Congress and South African trade unions were fighting apartheid, as a city we mobilised across the board to support their struggle. Trade unionists organised in Ford factories to smuggle ANC literature in the boots of cars, and seafarers dropped parcels at South African ports. The boycott movement played a significant role in successfully turning the tide on the apartheid Government, at a time when many powerful international Governments, including our own Thatcher-led Government, supported the regime. The importance of international solidarity when waging a struggle such as that against apartheid cannot be underestimated and this rings as true today as it has throughout history. In the words of Nelson Mandela:

"our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians". His words resonate today, with injustices and violations of international humanitarian law across the globe still demanding accountability. Now, as then, international pressure will be key to achieving peace and justice.

Let us be clear: the aim of the Bill is to limit our ability to take action to protest, and the chilling effect that will be created is immeasurable. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the Bill is the so-called "gagging clause", whereby not only will public officials be prevented from raising the issue of human rights abuses in financial decision making, but it will be illegal for them to refer to the Bill as the reason preventing them from making a financial decision influenced by human rights abuses. For a Government who claim to champion freedom of speech, this is the depths of hypocrisy. It should make Members in all parts of this House seriously consider the impact of their vote today.

Today's vote is historic and it is up to us to decide which side of history we are on: are we a nation that champions freedom of expression and conscience, one that encourages acts of solidarity with the oppressed, or are we a nation that curbs even the basic right to speak out about violations and abuses of human rights? Vote for the reasoned amendment. Decline to give this Bill a Second Reading.

7.31 pm

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I strongly support this legislation, and I want to thank all constituents who have been in touch with me to tell me their views on it. It is my honour and privilege to represent a constituency that is home to a substantial Jewish community.

As we have heard this evening, the BDS movement is deeply divisive. The founder of the group and many of its leadership figures do not recognise the right of Israel to exist. They have no commitment to a negotiated settlement and want to drive the two sides apart, not bring them together.

[Theresa Villiers]

As has been pointed out, these local boycotts split communities here in Britain. Many Jewish people feel a deep sense of connection to Israel, so they could feel intimidated and victimised if their local council were to pursue a boycott. The spillover of anti-Israel to anti-Jewish attitudes and discrimination is illustrated by the supermarket that, in 2014, took kosher foods off the shelf after protesters gathered outside in support of a boycott of Israel.

Moreover, the BDS movement often seeks to justify its campaign using the allegation that Israel can be equated with apartheid South Africa. That is a pernicious slur. In falsely accusing Israel of racism, it singles out the world's only distinctively Jewish state for unjustified and disproportionate attack. That falls squarely within the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism and we should always reject it. I am gravely concerned that BDS activity has sometimes legitimised and driven antisemitism, and I note that the Communities Secretary has stated that BDS has led to "appalling antisemitic rhetoric and abuse".

There is no justification for a boycott or sanctions against Israel. Cutting economic ties with Israel will do nothing to further the peace process, or to get negotiations restarted. Israel is our ally. It is the only real democracy in the middle east; the only country in the middle east where equality for women is fully protected; the only one where the rights of the LGBT community are respected; and the only one with a genuinely free press and a fiercely independent judiciary. We should be strengthening economic, cultural and academic links with Israel, not severing them.

Deeper engagement with Israel means that we as a country can play a stronger role in supporting peace and reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians. It also brings advantages for jobs and economic growth here in the UK. I welcome the 2030 road map for bilateral relations between our two countries, which was signed in March and will boost tech, trade and security ties. The phenomenal energy of Israel's digital economy and its cutting-edge pharmaceutical sector are just two reasons why trade with Israel is an important source of prosperity for us in Britain. In 2017, the Health Minister Lord O'Shaughnessy estimated that every year some 100 million NHS prescription items in England are made by companies in Israel. If we listened to the BDS movement and adopted its approach, we would see major disruption of NHS procurement of the medication that so many of us need and, inevitably, that would lead to rising costs.

**Brendan Clarke-Smith** (Bassetlaw) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend in welcoming today's legislation. BDS activists who bully councils into adopting these measures are also bullying the UK's advertising industry. For example, Stop Funding Hate and Ethical Consumer are pro-BDS groups that tell their supporters to follow the BDS national committee, a group with links to Hamas and other designated terrorist groups. Does she agree that today we can, certainly as a first step, set an example in tackling BDS within public bodies?

**Theresa Villiers:** Indeed. Today is our opportunity to take a stand against BDS and I encourage as many hon. Members as possible to do that.

As part of the largest ever deal between an Israeli and a UK company, Rolls-Royce is delivering engines for El Al Dreamliner aircraft, supporting many highly skilled jobs in Britain. That type of massive commercial opportunity would be a thing of the past if we let these BDS boycotts take hold and spread.

In conclusion, this is a timely Bill that I hope the House will back. I am deeply disappointed that Labour has said that it is voting against it today. The question is: do you support boycotts against Israel or don't you? I am strongly opposed to boycotts of Israel, which is why I am voting for the Bill this evening. I am proud that it is a Conservative Government who have listened to the Jewish community on this vital issue and brought forward the Bill it asked for to ban council boycotts. Israel is our friend and ally and we should be trying to increase trade with Israel, not trying to ban it. There is no justification for local councils adopting their own international trade policy. These are rightly matters for our democratically elected Government in Westminster. I urge hon. and right hon. Members to support the Bill in the Division Lobby this evening.

7.37 pm

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I had been looking forward to this legislation. As the chair of Labour Friends of Israel, I am against efforts to destabilise, delegitimise and destroy Israel, the world's only Jewish state. The purpose of the BDS movement, with its talk of apartheid, genocide and ghettos, is to demonise and, ultimately, destroy Israel. I had hoped we might see a simple Bill designed to restrain the ambitions of BDS, with its single target, the state of Israel. Boycotts are not new for Jews. On 1 April this year, we marked the 90th anniversary of the Nazis' first nationwide action against the Jews, a boycott targeting Jewish businesses and professionals. There is a long, dark history of boycotts directed against Jewish people. For the world's only Jewish state to be targeted in this way shows complete indifference to that history and a single-minded determination to destroy Israel's right to exist.

The effect of BDS is felt not only in Israel. A 2019 Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy report concluded that the victims of BDS include Jews in the diaspora. Let us think what it means to be Jewish in Britain today. There is an understandable affinity between Israel and Jews in this country, but every day Jewish students confront obsessive campaigns for an academic boycott of Israeli universities. BDS seeks to prevent Israeli artists, actors and musicians from performing in Britain. It wants libraries to remove Israeli authors and to "no-platform" Israeli speakers.

Supporters of BDS often seek to draw a comparison with South Africa. The measures taken at that time were designed to end apartheid and bring about the democratic state that we see today. But—here I agree with the Secretary of State—BDS does not support a two-state solution, advocate peace negotiations or seek to bring communities together. To be fair to its leader, Omar Barghouti, he is clear that he opposes a Jewish state in any part of what he calls Palestine. We all know what the chant "From the river to the sea" actually means. BDS is a policy designed to end Israel's existence. The movement opposes the idea of normalisation; in fact, normalisation has become a pejorative term in relation to Israel and Palestine thanks to the efforts of such movements.

Of course, BDS is not without success: a vociferous campaign against SodaStream led to the closure of a plant in the west bank and the loss of 600 Palestinian jobs. BDS puts at risk the 10,000 UK businesses that have import-export arrangements. The UK is Israel's second largest trading partner, with a relationship worth about £7 billion. Israeli companies provide one in seven NHS drugs, estimated to save us around £3 billion per year. As we have heard, we are negotiating a new free trade arrangement, which will vastly improve benefits for both countries. Our security arrangements help to save thousands of lives and regularly help to foil terrorist attacks in the UK, yet BDS wants to end military co-operation.

It is against that background that I had hoped to welcome this legislation; instead, we get a dog's dinner—a Bill that in its present form can serve only to guarantee conflict between the Government, local authorities and other public bodies, and will inevitably result in endless legal challenges. It seeks to limit the freedom for councils and other public bodies to speak out in the face of obvious injustice. Far from not singling out Israel—a key demand of many Jewish and anti-BDS groups—specific attention is drawn to Israel in the Bill.

This is a Bill that has lost focus. Its scattergun approach and willingness to confuse legitimate political protest with what should be simple powers to restrict the demands associated with the BDS movement will provide endless publicity opportunities for Israel's enemies. It is unworkable in its current form. If there is to be any hope of the Bill becoming a reasonable, practical measure, it requires substantial improvement. I hope that the Secretary of State will not play party or petty politics but seek to build consensus with people across the House who are willing to work together on measures designed to rid us of the malign influence of the BDS movement.

At the same time, I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) that, although I am full of admiration for her good intentions and acknowledge that the reasoned amendment has been framed in response to the mess before us, I am not entirely sure that it cuts mustard either. Nevertheless, in deference to her good intentions, I will support the amendment tonight. If I am fortunate enough to serve on the Bill Committee, I hope we can find common ground to create workable legislation to tackle the folly of BDS ambitions and its one and only target. I hope we can achieve that without imposing ludicrous restrictions on legitimate political activities, or the freedom of speech of local government and those who represent public bodies. Having waited so long, tonight is a tremendous disappointment for me, but there is still time to put things right. I urge Ministers not to ignore the opportunity.

7.44 pm

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): I welcome many of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), and particularly his final comments about wanting to work together across the House to see how the Bill can be improved. It will, I think, come as no surprise to many that I am uncomfortable with the Bill as it stands—and arguably more, not less, so after hearing the Secretary of State's almost exclusive focus on the BDS movement and its antisemitic agenda.

The point of the Bill was to fulfil a Conservative party manifesto commitment, so let me explain why I am unhappy with it. First, as it stands, the Bill fulfils

something different from our manifesto commitment; secondly, it seriously undermines our commitment to freedom and tolerance; thirdly, it gives a special and exclusive right not just to Israel but to parts of Israel that are either annexed or illegally occupied; fourthly, it effectively outlaws even the express thought of disagreeing with the Bill, should it be passed; and lastly, it could backfire—and it is elements of the Jewish communities who say that, not me.

Let me bring the detail alive. Our manifesto did not mention Israel or the BDS; it focused on preventing

“public bodies from imposing their own direct or indirect ...sanctions...against foreign countries.”

That commitment was, absolutely rightly, country-agnostic, yet clause 3(7) specifically protects not just Israel but the Golan Heights and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which are of course not countries. The provisions exempt Israel alone from any change in Government policy—for example, the sanctions on Russia—and that could be changed only by primary legislation.

Our manifesto also rightly committed to championing free speech and tolerance. As I mentioned earlier, as have others, the Secretary of State for Education legislated only recently specifically to enforce that commitment on our universities; now, however, as a university vice-chancellor put it to me, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has told him that he cannot even say, were it allowed, that he would prefer his university not to purchase anything manufactured on illegal settlements in the occupied territories. Is that really what is intended?

This Bill, as presented on Second Reading, appears to be a pro-Israel and anti-BDS Bill much more than the country-agnostic anti-boycott Bill promised in our manifesto. In turn, that has caused—there was no point in some Members denying this earlier—some Jewish commentators in Jewish media, Jewish student unions and Jewish civic society groups to express real concern that the Bill risks backfiring. As *The Jewish Chronicle* said, it would be

“bitterly ironic if this...bill”

to tackle the

“anti-Israel BDS, ends up hurting those who so many...have sought to help”.

The Union of Jewish Students went further and said that the Bill may

“pit Jews against other minorities”.

So what to do? The Labour party solution is to rip the Bill up and start again in unspecified ways. Our solution should be different. We should fulfil our manifesto commitment to legislate against public-body sanctions in a country-agnostic way, but we do not need a special rule for Israel, let alone for annexed or occupied areas that the United Kingdom does not recognise as a legitimate part of Israel. I very much hope that on Third Reading the Government will reconsider clause 4(1)(b), which as it stands is antidemocratic, and drop clause 3(7), which is neither necessary nor appropriate. I will therefore abstain in the vote on Second Reading. I very much hope that the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider drafting amendments will be strongly realised on Third Reading.



7.48 pm

**Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): I remind Members that I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

First, I want to be very clear that the Liberal Democrats condemn antisemitism. Anti-Jewish hatred has absolutely no place in our society, and we must all do more—as individuals, as political parties and as a Parliament—to tackle antisemitism in all its forms. Nor do we support the BDS movement or any other singling out of Israel driven by anti-Jewish hatred. However, we do not believe that this piece of legislation is going to help to tackle antisemitism. In fact, as many Members throughout the House, including the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), have already set out, the measures in the Bill could even be counterproductive, which is frankly the last thing we want.

Liberal Democrats are also deeply concerned by a series of the provisions in the Bill. First, it will greatly restrict the ability of public bodies to take action against human rights abuses. Many public bodies as well as civil society organisations are alarmed by the persecution of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, which has led to the detention of more than a million people by the Chinese state. Regrettably, the Government have failed to recognise the genocide that is taking place in Xinjiang, even though Parliament has called on them to do so. It is appalling that a local council will be prevented from calling what is taking place in Xinjiang what it is—a genocide—simply because the Government continue to take a cowardly approach. It seems extraordinary that a local council or museum would risk a significant fine by deciding that they did not want to buy products coming from Xinjiang.

Many of us in this place will remember the popular boycotts of South African goods in the 1980s, which were an effective way of demonstrating opposition to apartheid and which added to the international political pressure to end the regime. In this country, it was local councils that led the way then—and thank goodness they did—but under these new provisions, such action would be illegal.

Secondly, this piece of legislation represents an unjustified restriction on the power of local communities to take decisions for themselves. As a Liberal Democrat, I believe in liberalism, federalism and localism. We believe that it is up to local authorities and public bodies to be able to decide for themselves what they do. If local councillors are elected on a manifesto that includes a commitment to a boycott on ethical or environmental grounds, we believe that those councillors should be held to account by their local electorate, not banned by a distant central Government.

Thirdly, we are hugely concerned by the restriction on the freedom of speech on public bodies and elected representatives in clause 4—the gagging clause. The Bill does not just restrict a public body from engaging in boycott and divestment; it restricts it from saying that it would support such a boycott if it were legal. That represents a significant overreach, which will erode a fundamental democratic right—that of free speech.

Fourthly, I echo the concerns raised by other Members that the provisions in clause 3 represent an attempt by the Government to change their position on the status of the occupied territories. The UK Government have

always made a distinction between the occupied territories and Israel, in line with international law. That is clear in everything from our trading arrangements to the advice given to businesses looking to operate in the occupied territories. However, the Bill conflates the two by listing the occupied territories as exempt from the Bill alongside Israel. The Bill goes against not just the widespread consensus held on both sides of the House and by our allies, but international law. What an irony it is that, at the heart of a Bill designed to restrict local councils from speaking out about international issues, we find the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities trying to conduct his own foreign policy. It is almost as if he has forgotten the purported purpose of his own legislation.

On today of all days, when we have awoken yet again to more violence in the region, it is incredibly depressing that the Government are choosing not to stand up for international law, at a time when there is such hopelessness around the conflict.

In conclusion, I firmly agree that we need to do more on the pressing need to tackle antisemitism. I agree that the BDS movement targeting Israel will not help to achieve peace between Israel and Palestine. If there is a need to beef-up legislation on hate crime or prejudice against protected characteristics, such as race and religion, Liberal Democrats would wholeheartedly support such a move. Local councils should not be singling out one country and holding it to a higher standard than others because of their own prejudice, but closing down debate on international human rights issues will not achieve the stated aim of stamping out antisemitism. The resolution to the problem is not to clamp down on debate on international human rights issues. The Liberal Democrats will oppose the Bill for that reason, and will be voting in favour of the reasoned amendment tabled by those on the Opposition Front Bench.

I urge the Secretary of State to rethink this legislation and work across party lines to resolve issues of prejudice and discrimination by more practical and fair means.

7.53 pm

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I rise to speak in support of the legislation this evening. I welcome the fact that we are following through on a manifesto commitment to bring forward legislation in this difficult, sensitive and complicated area. I very much agree with the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), and my right hon. Friends the Members for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Sir Simon Clarke) and for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers).

We have had a number of speeches striking slightly different tones. There was a very good speech from the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), who tried to strike a reasonable tone and explained the rationale behind Labour's reasoned amendment. Unfortunately for her and for the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), who also made a thoughtful and intelligent speech, many of the speeches from the Opposition Benches seemed to be in favour of boycotts, and wanting to keep a candle burning for being able to use boycotts, divestment and sanctions as tools at a local authority level, or among other public bodies. We on the Conservative Benches are clear that we do not want to see public money being used in that way. We are clear about the

main purpose of this legislation, which is to tackle, as has already been discussed, the BDS movement, with its pernicious effects, its links to antisemitism and the very ugly and divisive character behind it. To any Conservative Member who stands up and says that that was not the purpose of our commitment in the manifesto, I say that that is just not true. The gestation of the Bill—the process that it has gone through and the internal discussion—has very much centred on trying to do something for the first time about the BDS movement.

To those Members who argue that the problem with this legislation is that it will attract legal challenge, I say that every single time we have tried to do something about the BDS movement it gets a legal challenge. We know that the BDS movement will try to fight this in the court. That is not a surprise, but that should not be a reason for us to resile from our commitment to do something about the matter.

There will be Members in the House today who believe that the BDS movement, leaving aside its ugly antisemitic characteristics, is a legitimate way of trying to challenge the state of Israel. We heard that in some of the speeches. The trouble with the BDS movement, as we know, is that time and again it singles out the state of Israel in a way that it does not do with other countries.

As for the Labour party trying to maintain a reasonableness about its position, I say look at what it does when it is in government. When the Welsh Labour Government tried to introduce a new national procurement note in 2020, what did they do? Surprise, surprise, they singled out one state for potential sanctions—the state of Israel. I am talking about Labour Ministers of the Crown today serving in the Welsh Government in Cardiff, so Members will forgive me if I do not have total confidence in the reasonableness of the Labour position that it is trying to put forward.

**Crispin Blunt:** The BDS is a Palestinian-led movement. Who else is it supposed to protest against? I realise that it has a global application, but it is a Palestinian-led movement about Palestine.

**Stephen Crabb:** My hon. Friend is right: it is a Palestinian-led movement. When we consider the individuals and organisations—Palestinian and otherwise—at the root of it, we can see that the movement is deeply problematic. I do not believe that any Conservative should be identifying and aligning themselves with any aspect of the BDS movement.

I welcome the legislation. I welcome, too, the fact that the Secretary of State has made a very strong commitment to working with others and seeing whether improvements can be made to the Bill. He has shown a genuine openness in that regard. None the less, improving the Bill cannot mean watering it down to make it ineffective, which we know the opponents of the Bill—the BDS movement outside this place—want us to do. I hope that the Government will remain robust and clear-sighted on this, but I also hope that we can work pragmatically and get good legislation on the statute book.

7.58 pm

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I am pleased to contribute to what has been a generally thoughtful debate, from the moment that the shadow Secretary of

State rose to speak. I am sorry that the Secretary of State left so soon after his own rather provocative contribution, because he would have benefited from hearing many of the speeches.

This is an ill-judged and unnecessary attack on local democracy—unnecessary not least because of the provisions of the Local Government Act 1988, which, alongside the notorious clause 28 prohibiting local authorities from “promotion of homosexuality”, also banned non-commercial consideration on contracts on the basis of “the country or territory of origin.”

That remains in place, so the Secretary of State has law to refer to, without needing to bring forward this Bill, if there are the problems he describes.

That legislation was a response by the Thatcher Government to a campaign co-ordinated by Sheffield City Council. We were the first council in 1981, under the leadership of David Blunkett, to pledge to end all links with apartheid. Many others followed, and in 1983 we set up Local Authorities Against Apartheid, developing a network of around 120 councils taking action—action that was subsequently praised by Nelson Mandela after his release for its contribution to ending apartheid.

As someone who was in the leadership of the anti-apartheid movement for 20 years, I do not accept the application of the term apartheid to Israel, although I have to say that, if the policy trajectory of the current Israeli Government continues in the way it has, that comparison will be increasingly difficult to resist. My point about the action that we organised is that it demonstrates the long history of local authority action over human rights, which is something we should be proud of, and of local politicians responding to local concerns, whether about South Africa 40 years ago or about China today.

Clause 3 will enable action to be taken where dispensation is given—by the whim of the Secretary of State, not even by Parliament. However, that highlights the exception provided in clause 3(7) in relation to Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights.

I want to be clear that I do not support the BDS campaign against Israel. I do think that we should long ago have taken action on economic engagement with the illegal settlements, to match our words with positive measures, and it is extraordinary that this Bill prevents public bodies from implementing the Government's own advice to business not to trade with the illegal settlements. However, for those of us who do not support BDS, that does not mean we should support banning it, and much of Israeli society would agree.

I am grateful to Yachad, which many colleagues will know is a significant voice within the mainstream British Jewish community, campaigning for a political resolution in which Israel thrives alongside a viable and independent Palestinian state. In its briefing on this Bill, it drew parallels with the debate in Israel on its own anti-boycott law in 2011, in which Tzipi Livni, then Leader of the Opposition in the Knesset and previously Foreign Secretary, said:

“I disagree with those that demand boycotts, but I will fight for their right to express their views.”

Dan Meridor of Likud, then Deputy Prime Minister, said:

“I oppose boycotts, but they should not be illegal.”

[Paul Blomfield]

Ruvi Rivlin, then Leader of the Knesset and subsequently President of Israel, slammed the law for “turning freedom of speech into a civil injustice.”

The Government argue that this Bill is necessary in opposing antisemitism, but, as others have said, there are important voices within the Jewish community who disagree. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for students, I have worked closely with the leadership of the National Union of Students in challenging antisemitism within its own organisation, and on every step of that journey I have liaised with the Union of Jewish Students. Nobody will question the UJS’s credentials as a robust opponent of antisemitism. At its annual conference recently, UJS unanimously passed a resolution reaffirming its opposition to BDS, but rejecting any attempt to outlaw it. One of those involved in that motion wrote recently in *The Times*:

“Using legislation to outlaw BDS will do nothing in the fight against antisemitism... We may disagree with the BDS movement—we may even think that there are some people who support the BDS movement who are motivated by antisemitism—but the tactics of boycott, divestment, and sanctions are non-violent and legitimate.”

The Secretary of State has argued that it is his responsibility to bring forward this legislation in the context of the Government’s manifesto commitment. I am conscious of the fact that the Government have fairly casually disregarded manifesto commitments in the past, but even if that were his justification, he should recognise that things have changed enormously since 2019. The new extremist Israeli Government are moving from de facto to de jure annexation of the occupied territories. Illegal settlements have been legalised and many more are planned, with the responsibility for them given to a far-right Minister who denies the existence of the Palestinian people and has been condemned by the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Today, we have seen the massive Israeli attack on Jenin, and not the first; it follows months of raids across the west bank and on Nablus. Across the west bank, settler attacks—killing and injuring Palestinians, torching their homes, their businesses and their cars—are being encouraged by the Israeli Government and those responsible are going unpunished. All that is designed to end the prospect of a viable Palestinian state and frustrate attempts to secure a just settlement.

Those Israeli civil society voices who support our ambition for a two-state solution have made it clear that there could not be a worse time for the UK to send a signal that we see the occupied territories as part of Israel in the way that this Bill is framed. We should not do it. I urge the Government to think again.

8.6 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): I draw the attention of the House to my declaration in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), with whom I very largely agreed.

I want to start with a challenge to my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) to finish off the answer to my question about BDS itself. BDS is a Palestinian-led movement, so it is not remotely surprising that its attention centres on the policies of Israel, which is in illegal occupation of

Palestinian territory. It is Israeli policy that is preventing any possibility of a two-state solution from becoming a reality and BDS is the only movement within Palestinian civil society that is pursuing a non-violent course of resistance.

We need to ask ourselves some fundamental questions about what we expect of the occupied Palestinians. If we present the BDS movement in the very extreme way—described to me as “disingenuous” by someone who has messaged me in the course of this debate—it has been presented in this House, we are denying the Palestinians in that sense by banning their only legitimate way of expressing resistance to that occupation.

That is where we need to take a step or two back. We are now on the receiving end of more than 50 years of illegal Israeli occupation of somebody else’s territory. In an egregious way, Israel has occupied and settled that territory with 700,000 Jewish people. The physical result of those settlements is that a two-state solution is now in effect impossible.

There needs to be some serious consideration of the implications of Israeli policy, because it has been deliberate. We sit here parroting our support for a two-state solution, and the only point of difference I have with my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) who is now Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee is that I am afraid I now do support a one-state solution, because a two-state solution is now impossible.

I hope that hon. Members on the Front Bench will reflect that the people who convinced me of that were the negotiation support unit that the Department for International Development was paying for in 2002 to give the Palestinian negotiators a bit of capacity and heft in conducting negotiations with their Israeli counterparts. Diana Buttu and Michael Tarazi were themselves then in favour of a one-state solution. What is wrong with that as a vision? Indeed, it would mirror the original sense of moral purpose about the state of Israel. It was a great achievement of the 20th century to find a homeland for the Jewish people, who have been on the wrong end of history for hundreds and hundreds of years, particularly the appalling policies towards Jewish people in Europe.

I say to my colleagues: do not try to present the one-state solution as a terrorist answer driving Israelis and Jews into the sea—that is absolute nonsense and of course it will never happen. If we are about trying to create national reconciliation and a path to peace, we need now to start thinking originally. Palestinians are looking over the wall at Israel and, strangely enough, young professional Palestinians want what the Israelis have. I do not think that Israelis in a similar position want to send their children, in 20, 30 or 40 years’ time, to police the occupation.

We see today the terrible events in Jenin, which are a product of the disaster and false horizon that the Oslo process has turned out to be for the Palestinian people. There is desperate anger in occupied parts of Palestine, where everything is being taken away from people, but here we are attacking a movement that tries—although, of course, there are elements of unacceptable rhetoric—to stay within the limits of peaceful resistance to illegal occupation.

It would be thought absolutely astonishing that we are faced with this measure in the British Parliament. We need to think back on our history and the Balfour



declaration. There were two parts to that declaration. We have delivered on one of them, but I am afraid that the rights of the people who were living in the territory that is now Israel have been violated in the most profound and fundamental way. We now have to deal with the dispossession that came of the establishment of the state of Israel. We need to deal with the results of this illegal occupation. We in this House are about to take away not only the ability to seek peacefully the means to do that through local authorities, but people's right to express support for it. This is a very un-Conservative measure and it needs to be rejected at the first opportunity, which is this evening, and that is how I will be voting.

8.12 pm

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt).

Like many others, I think this is a sordid and grubby little Bill that takes away many of the political freedoms that we have enjoyed for decades in this country. It follows, of course, similar pieces of legislation from the Government over the past few years. They have sought to restrict our freedom to dissent and protest, but this Bill goes further, as others have already remarked upon. For the first time that I can remember, the Bill seeks to criminalise thought as well as deeds. That takes it into a whole new dimension and is reason enough for it to be thrown out by this House tonight.

We live in a dangerous and uncertain world. Humanity faces many challenges, some of them existential in nature. I would argue that this is a time in our public discourse and public life when we need more moral judgments and ethical considerations, not fewer as the Bill tries to suggest. In fact, the Bill does not actually outlaw local authorities and public authorities taking ethical and moral judgments; it simply outlaws them taking ones that the Government disagree with. The Government are trying to tape to themselves not just the legitimacy of being the elected political Administration of the country, but the role of arbiter and mouthpiece for all of civil society. That is quite ridiculous.

As others have said, many people elect their public officials to represent their point of view, and they have a right to do so. If we constrain the ability of the representative, we also constrain the ability of the people. It is in the field of pension policy that this is most ridiculous. Like others, I am, since the age of 60, in receipt of a local government pension. That is because I paid into a savings fund for the years in which I worked in local government. It is my money and that of my fellow pensioners. What right do this Government have to tell me what I can and cannot do with my own money?

The Government have sought to place the question of Israel right at the heart of this legislation and of their argument. It is fundamentally based on a flawed premise: that criticism of the Israeli Government or of Israeli state policies is in itself antisemitic. That is wrong. We in this House should never get ourselves into the position of thinking that we have to choose between defending the human and political rights of Palestinians in the middle east, and fighting antisemitism on the streets of our own country and throughout the world. We can and we must do both.

I had the privilege to attend last week a meeting called by Yachad, a Jewish organisation, in this House. I heard Michael Sfard, a distinguished human rights lawyer from Israel, speak on the situation. He gave a concise picture of what is happening in Israel today and described the actions of the current Israeli Government—the most right-wing, anti-Palestinian Government that Israel has ever had. He described how two projects are under way in that area of the world at the moment: the first is the de jure annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories into the state of Israel, and the second is the changing of constitutional law inside the state of Israel to allow that to happen. That is what has provoked mass demonstrations by the ordinary Israeli public on the streets of Israel, where hundreds of thousands of people are turning up to protest.

That is what has led to a situation in which the current Government of Israel has opinion poll ratings down at 20%. If there were an election today, they would be thrown out of office by a landslide. Yet in the context of what is happening on the streets of the middle east at the moment, and of even the American Administration trying to put distance between themselves and President Netanyahu, what is the policy of the UK Government? Their policy—an outlier in the international community—is to welcome the Israeli Administration with open arms. No one would be more pleased or gain more succour from the passing of such legislation than the current Israeli Administration, and no one would be more crestfallen about its passing than those of progressive liberal opinion inside the state of Israel, who do not want that to happen. The choice that we need to make is whether we will stand with the people of Israel and of Palestine in protecting their human and political rights against a very right-wing anti-Palestinian Administration, or give succour—almost alone in the world in doing so—to that Administration.

I have already run out of time, Madam Deputy Speaker, but let me finish with this. We have to ask ourselves why the Bill comes at this particular time, in the middle of all the crises in the world and the domestic economic crises right here on our own doorstep. Why this piece of legislation at this particular time? I think the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) hit the nail on the head: this is a grubby measure by the governing party to try to embarrass His Majesty's Opposition for party political advantage. It is sordid, bad politics. It will not help Jewish communities in this country and it will not help to find a solution in the middle east for all the people who live there.

8.18 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I join the Front-Bench spokespeople in their tributes to the late Lord Kerslake. I will never forget the help and advice that he gave me on delivering the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It is sadly ironic that the Kerslake commission, on which I was proud to serve, was due to meet tomorrow to approve a long-awaited report, but it has been cancelled because of his sad death.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on this long-awaited Bill, in which we take on—let us be clear—the BDS movement directly. This legislation is an endeavour for which I have been campaigning for many years, and I thank him for his tireless work in bringing this policy to fruition. I listened carefully to

[*Bob Blackman*]

the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). I know his views—they are very clear, and he has espoused them on many occasions in the Chamber. He is vocal about them, and he is rightly held in regard, but I am afraid that he is wrong.

The House will be aware that the ability for public bodies to take powers unto themselves that should correctly be reserved for the Government has sown division and discord across our nations. Calls for universities to sever ties with academic partners in Israel have led to a great number of prejudicial motions at our institutions, isolating and alienating Jewish students. The National Union of Students has reported that anti-Israel hatred is plainly linked to the racist treatment of British Jews, corroborating findings from the Community Security Trust, which found that campus antisemitism has hiked by 22% in the past year alone. This brand of student politics should not be permitted at our universities, let alone in our great democratic institutions. This is not news. When I was at university the same things went on—and that was a long time ago.

Speaking of democracy, I shall elaborate on the claim that I have heard in recent days that this Bill somehow harms our commitment to free speech. I believe that it is the proponents of BDS who are pitting one community against another, which results in a chilling effect on honest debate. It is intimidation, marginalisation and incitement to hatred. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), a former Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, who said in 2021 that

“successive studies have shown the single best statistical predictor of anti-Jewish hostility is the amount of BDS activity”.—[*Official Report*, 22 February 2022; Vol. 709, c. 213.]

Hon. Members do not have to take my word for it. Omar Barghouti, founder of the BDS movement, wrote 20 years ago in 2003 that

“the two-state solution for the Palestinian-Israel conflict is finally dead...the more just, moral and therefore enduring alternative...the one-state solution...where, by definition Jews will be a minority”.

The BDS national committee, the directive organ of the BDS movement, has on its board organisations including the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, and a coalition of proscribed terrorist groups, including Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and many others. The council’s leader, Khaled al-Batsh, acts as a senior official for Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The council’s general co-ordinator, Mahmoud Nawajaa, has publicly supported the armed wing of Hamas, the terrorist organisation that heinously murdered three British nationals—a mother and her two daughters—in April. Today in Holland, two BDS fundraisers were arrested for securing €5 million to go directly to Hamas.

The propositions set out in the Bill are a safeguard against the rising tide of discrimination and double standards, and will provide the balance crucially needed in our national conversation. The Bill will empower the Government to introduce secondary legislation to enforce a boycott of states committing human rights abuses. In response to colleagues who have cited particular countries, that means that the Government can introduce those measures through secondary legislation. In turn, public bodies will be able legitimately to advance their own

trade sanctions in support of the national interest, as determined by the democratically elected Government. Surely, that is welcome. This is precisely what will, I hope, happen shortly in relation to Russia.

The Bill will inevitably generate much debate, but I restate its importance in protecting the Government’s foreign policy interests, the Jewish community and the wellbeing of the many citizens who have grown tired of grandstanding public bodies exploiting the public purse and the money on which they depend. The Government will have my full support on this important matter. I listened carefully to the shadow spokesperson, who gave a very reasonable speech. When the Bill goes into Committee—I hope that it will go into Committee—all these different elements should be examined carefully to make sure that we end up with a Bill which, I hope, can command the support of the overwhelming majority in the House.

8.24 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): It is genuinely an honour to speak in this debate. There have been some incredible contributions, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for the way in which she recalibrated the tone of the debate. It got off to an appalling start, so I congratulate her on her tone and the way in which she has engaged in discussion of this vexed issue.

This is a difficult Bill. It is one of the most freedom-damaging, human rights-destroying pieces of legislation that I have ever seen. It is badly drafted and ill thought-through. I take issue with the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). The concept of trying to correct an appalling Bill that cannot be corrected is not one that I share. That said, the Labour party has tabled a reasoned amendment, which rightly declines to give the Bill a Second Reading, and sets out a compelling case as to why it should be given short shrift. I speak in favour and support of the powerful arguments contained in the amendment.

The Bill will, as we have heard, prevent public bodies from making decisions to procure goods or services, or invest or divest according to their own ethical framework. Local authorities have long played an important role in the protection and promotion of human rights overseas, for example, in opposing the apartheid regime in South Africa, as Members have mentioned. The Bill will make the Westminster Government the ultimate arbiter of what is acceptable. As the reasoned amendment sets out, the Bill is a clear and obvious fetter on the principle of devolution and on freedom of speech. By hamstringing the due diligence that public bodies carry out, it will entirely disregard the European convention on human rights.

The Bill will be a disaster for the environment and the drive to net zero, by withdrawing the freedom of public bodies to boycott countries that pollute our environment. As for Palestine, which has been the subject of a lot of attention in this debate, the legal opinion of Richard Hermer KC, commissioned by Labour Front Benchers, states that

“legislation prohibiting local authorities from taking steps to promote Palestinian self-determination within the OPT, taken with the terms of the exclusion in Clause 3(7), would likely place the United Kingdom in breach of international law obligations.”

Labour’s amendment points to the way in which that clause conflates the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan heights with the state of Israel, undermining

the UK's long-standing cross-party position, and running contrary to UN Security Council resolutions, specifically resolution 2334.

By singling out the territories under Israel's control in this legislation, the UK will give licence to the continuation of the terrible events that unfolded in Jenin today, without an appropriate, legitimate and peaceful response. No other people should be put in the position of the Palestinians. At this very moment, we are seeing the images from Jenin, where a massive number of Israeli occupation forces are committing what the Palestinian president has called a "war crime" as they storm the city and refugee camp. They have killed at least nine Palestinians, including three children, and injured countless innocent civilians. Over 180 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces since the beginning of 2023—about one a day. At least 34 of those have been children. The destruction of schools, homes and lives is being carried out with total impunity.

How many times have we heard warm and ineffective words from Ministers at the Dispatch Box? One wonders how such an attitude and policy would have played out in respect of South Africa. The Tory Government of the day deemed the South African apartheid regime legal, and Nelson Mandela a terrorist. If that policy had succeeded, he would have been left to rot in jail. What has happened to any sense of a moral compass in our country? Have we forgotten the lessons of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa?

The Bill would make it an offence for someone from a public body to say that, if not for the legislative ban contained in the Bill, they would have chosen to pursue some form of sanction. That has been rightly called a "Minority Report" provision and I know it worries many Members across this House. The Bill is wholly incoherent, given how we have rightly imposed sanctions on Russia following its illegal invasion and occupation of Ukrainian territory. The Bill is simply wrong—an offence against human decency and international law. I will be exercising one of my human rights, the freedom of expression and of conscience, by voting consistently against it at every stage. It is unworthy of this House and I have no doubt that history will judge it so. I urge Members to support the reasoned amendment, but to reject the Bill in its entirety.

8.30 pm

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I declare my interests as a vice-president of the Local Government Association and the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on British Jews. I am privileged to represent a very diverse constituency with a large and established Jewish population, and indeed many people from every possible religious background. It is great to see that, on the whole, those different communities get on extremely well, but this legislation is necessary for the reasons that many Members have outlined.

As the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) said, the long-standing BDS campaign creates a situation where the state of Israel, and Jewish people here in the UK and elsewhere, are singled out for criticism and discrimination. However, like my neighbour and hon. Friend, the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), I will be voting for the legislation, having noted a number of areas in which improvement is required, which I hope we will be able to address in Committee.

I will take each in turn. First, I urge Front-Bench colleagues to give serious consideration to entirely dropping clause 4(1)(b), which has raised a number of concerns among Members. In the context of local government, especially in respect of pensions committees, a significant population of councillors are decision makers for the purposes of the legislation and, as an increasing number of local authorities—especially small ones—move to the committee system, the constituency of members who would be considered decision makers for the purposes of the legislation gets larger and larger.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David) will probably remember the late councillor Ray Davies: everywhere you turned, you would find him protesting against something or chaining himself to railings about something else. We can imagine a situation in which a back-bench member of a local authority called to attend a pensions investment committee as a substitute member expresses the view that their preference would be to not make a particular decision because of concerns about the behaviour of a particular Government, and finds themselves in breach of the law as a result. That would seem to have a chilling effect on freedom of speech. We should ensure that those who disagree with a policy are able to express that view while still making a decision that is within the law, as outlined in clause 4(1)(a).

The second piece of important context goes to the point that was raised by the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge): we should give our local government colleagues a degree of respect for their common sense in this matter. At the Local Government Association, it was my privilege to do some work on exactly this issue, working with the Local Government Friends of Israel—a very good organisation. Through that process, we identified that, at the time, at most two or three councils had passed BDS motions. We should accord respect to our local government colleagues by removing clause 4(1)(b), recognising that, on the whole, they have been wise and sensible in exercising their powers.

The next issue is the way in which these powers are exercised in respect of contractors and subcontractors. On, for example, an investment committee or a procurement committee charged with making decisions to place contracts, elected members may not necessarily be aware of the decisions and policies of the bodies with which they are contracting. It is not unusual for a local government pension committee to have 15 to 20 investments at any one given time. Given that those private companies may themselves be under similar pressure to exercise BDS views, what is not always going to be transparent to those elected members is how those things are taking effect in practice. We need to ensure that, in bringing in what is intended to be about decision makers in public bodies, we are not losing our desired intention to ensure that BDS is not present in the public sector by ensuring that those bodies that are contracting or subcontracting are also within sight.

Again on my concern in respect of how these decisions will affect elected members in local authorities, the legislation envisages that it will apply where matters are in line with, or outside of, the policy of the Government. Paragraph 9 of the explanatory notes sets out the example of where a specific legislative provision was introduced in respect of sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. It is my view that when this legislation passes we need to be completely clear what



[David Simmonds]

we mean when we talk about the policy of the Government. Do we mean as expressed in legislation? Do we mean as expressed by the Minister at the Dispatch Box? What is it that we mean when we talk about the policy of the Government? Is it a policy of different Government Departments? We need to make sure, given that it would be a breach of the law to express opposition to it, that the position from which the policy of the Government is drawn is absolutely clear.

8.36 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), with his very pleasant reference to the late Ray Davies, who was a wonderful campaigner all his life.

A truly appalling piece of legislation has been put before us. It fits into the bigger picture of anti-democratic legislation that this Government have put forward that reduces the rights of free speech and assembly, over-empowers the police, restricts trade unions and tries to criminalise people who seek a place of safety and asylum on our shores. We have to put it in that context; it is yet another attack on the civil liberties of people in this country.

Over 70 organisations have expressed deep misgivings and opposition to the Bill. Muslim organisations, Jewish organisations, trade unions, human rights organisations, libertarian organisations, religious groups and many others have said that the Bill is wrong and that it will damage the civil liberties of everyone in this country. It gives massive power to the Secretary of State effectively to decide what local authorities can say, think or do. If a local authority, for example, decided it wanted to speak up about human rights in a country when a significant number of people from that country were living in its community—for example, there is a very large Somali community in my constituency—would my local authority not be allowed to say anything about Somalia under the Bill? It would have to seek the permission of the Secretary of State before it could do anything, and so it goes on; there are so many other examples.

Having been in this House since the 1980s, I sat through many debates about South Africa. There were many Members over there on the Government Benches—many—who supported the apartheid regime. They openly supported the apartheid regime, called Mandela a terrorist and asked for the banning of the African National Congress in this country. The ANC had its offices in my borough, and the South West Africa People's Organisation, which led to the liberation of Namibia, had its offices in my constituency. There were calls to ban them and, when local authorities such as Sheffield led the way on local authority action and opposition to apartheid, they faced sanctions from the Government. Why were they so concerned about it, other than to prevent any effective, peaceful show of loyalty and support to the people of South Africa who were facing the horrors of the apartheid regime?

Under this legislation, what we did over South Africa would be impossible or illegal, so we would end up suspending councillors, prosecuting local authorities and surcharging councillors. I am not sure where it would

lead. Some of us supported the people of Chile after General Pinochet seized power, and called for a boycott of Chilean goods and a non-investment policy in Chile; again, that would be illegal. On a different basis, some of us called for a boycott of Californian grapes when Californian grape pickers were facing oppression from police forces in California; again, that would be illegal. All the issues around the world that we are faced with, such as Indonesia's behaviour in West Papua, the failure of Morocco to allow a referendum on the future of Western Sahara, Saudi Arabia and its war against Yemen—any expression of that would be banned by the Bill. A terrifying Bill has been put forward here today.

Most of the Bill has been framed around Palestine and Israel. Many groups in Israel are frightened by the Bill and what goes with it and also believe that there should be justice for the people of Palestine. I spent Saturday evening talking to Mustafa Barghouti of the Palestinian National Initiative, who believes in non-violent resistance to the occupation. He pointed out to me—I noted the figures down as he was talking—that, at the moment on the west bank, there are 150 settlements, 70 more settlements are being planned or actually built at present, more than 400,000 Israeli people have been moved into those settlements and it is impossible for Palestinian people to move around their own area of land. The idea that the products made on those settlements that are sold outside should be seen as legitimate products—they are illegal within terms of international law and within terms of EU law. So I just ask that we understand the importance of the right of protest.

Today in Jenin, as an example of the occupation, 14,000 people are in a refugee camp that is less than 0.4 square kilometres—14,000 people in less than half a square kilometre of land. Israel Defense Forces says that it is not targeting civilians. It is impossible to use any kind of weaponry against the population there without targeting civilians. More have died. More bitterness, more hatred and more problems come down the road. Those people all around the world who want to support the Palestinian people are not antisemitic. They are not anti-Israeli groups, but what they do want is justice for the Palestinian people. That surely would be a much better and stronger message to send out from this House today, rather than the attempt to close down free speech in this country.

8.42 pm

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): Three decades ago, Margaret Thatcher said that the ANC was a “typical terrorist organisation”, adding

“Anyone who thinks it is going to run the government in South Africa is living in cloud-cuckoo land”.

History proved her wrong on that, but that history was shaped by the determined efforts of people worldwide, including millions in this country and many local governments, to boycott South Africa. The lesson is clear: Governments are not always right; Governments do not always make moral decisions; Governments do not always act in line with the wishes of the population, but through the democratic process, millions of people can effect change. This Bill ignores that lesson. It shuts down the freedom of people to exercise a key democratic right. It is just another example of this Government's anti-democratic crackdown, with restrictions on the right to vote, the right to protest and the right to strike.

Labour's reasoned amendment, which declines to give the Bill a Second Reading and which I will be supporting, makes the case clearly about the many deep flaws in the Bill, as did the shadow Secretary of State in her response. In summary, the Bill is a huge attack on the concept of ethical investment and procurement by preventing public bodies from being influenced by "political or moral disapproval" of the actions of any foreign state. The Government claim that boycott and divestment will still be possible, but just not where it

"relates specifically or mainly to a particular foreign territory".

That simply does not wash.

Almost all cases of companies engaging in human, labour or environmental abuses have a territorial element. If we are talking about divesting in companies that cut down the rainforest, for example, that activity will obviously take place in areas with rainforests, and certain countries would be targeted by campaigns. This Bill even bans public bodies from saying they would support such boycotts were it legal to do so. It is a gagging Bill that breaches freedom of speech and would prevent a local councillor in hustings debates or other public forums from giving their political view.

This Bill also has chilling elements in how it will be enforced, including potentially huge fines and far-reaching information compliance notices. The aim is clear: to put so much fear into public bodies of ending up in court that they do not just act within the law, but go beyond it in an effort to reduce that risk. As legal advice provided to the Labour party makes clear, this Bill would be likely to place the UK

"in breach of international law obligations"

and

"effectively equates the Occupied Palestinian Territories with Israel itself and is very difficult to reconcile with the long-standing position of the United Kingdom which supports a 'two-state solution' based on '1967 lines' in which the security and right to self-determination of both Israelis and Palestinians are protected."

I am afraid that I do not have any faith in the exemptions listed in the Bill at schedule 3. Just as apartheid was legal in South Africa, much environmental destruction takes place entirely legally. The very fact that something is illegal is often the rationale for a boycott and divestments campaign in the first place. Many people in the discussion today and around this Bill have mentioned boycotts—not just those relating to illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where we have seen terrible scenes today in Jenin, but arms boycotts against Saudi Arabia over its war crimes in Yemen, boycotts in Colombia over its past treatment of trade unionists, and commercial boycotts of goods relating to the treatment of the Uyghurs in China or the Rohingya in Myanmar. It is not for us to decide which countries people are allowed to boycott—that is a huge curtailment of basic freedom. We need to maintain the democratic rights of people to challenge Government policy through boycotts and divestment, if that is their wish.

To conclude, the Bill has faced widespread civil society opposition, including from the Quakers and the Methodists, the Muslim Association of Britain, Friends of the Earth, the Union of Jewish Students, the TUC, Unite the union, Unison and the directors of 14 Israeli civil society and human rights organisations, as well as Human Rights Watch, Liberty and Amnesty, whose own legal ruling suggests that the Bill would be illegal. Not all

those groups support boycotts, but they do support the right for people to boycott. That is what we are voting on today. We cannot allow the Government to scrap this cherished democratic right.

8.47 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Reference has been made to Bob Kerslake consistently throughout today. Bob and I were friends. I go back longer than most, because I go back to 1981, when I was a young man and a GLC councillor and Bob was a young man and a GLC officer. I fully concur with all the tributes that have been paid, but I also want to say that he was a good man. He was a very good person and a good friend, and we will miss him.

Let me come on to this debate. I do not want to repeat some of the arguments, but I want to get on record for my constituents why I am voting the way I am this evening. I will vote in solidarity with the amendment, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on her speech, but I will also be voting against the Bill, because I cannot do anything else.

The debate has largely focused on the specific BDS movement and Israel. Just to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), I want to talk about the right to boycott, to disinvest and to sanction as an issue. At the weekend I drafted an article, because I wanted to get clear in my own mind the whole issue around boycotts and the past history of the boycott, disinvestment and sanctions movement. To be frank, virtually all of my life I have been involved in some boycott, disinvestment or sanctions campaign, so it was almost like a flashback. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), I was outside the South African embassy when the City of London anti-apartheid group was on a 24-hour permanent picket.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I was arrested there.

**John McDonnell:** He was arrested; I was not. I was there on Christmas day simply singing carols.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** You got off lightly.

**John McDonnell:** I got off lightly. All we were singing for was the release of Nelson Mandela.

For the other one, I plead guilty. I was one of the organisers of the demonstrations over a decade ago against the royal visit of the Saudi leaders. We were calling for no public contracts to be awarded to companies operating in Saudi Arabia, because at that time they were beheading gay people for being gay. That was later focused on military support from this country for the Saudi attacks on Yemen. The list of BDS campaigns that I have supported goes on and on. I campaigned against the Bahraini regime and its ongoing brutal repression of the country's democratic movement, and the continued imprisonment of opposition political leaders. We have met some of them over the years, and they are still inside.

I have campaigned against the Sri Lankan Administration owing to their genocidal attack on the Tamils, with their continued abuse of human rights, their use of torture, the disappearances, and the colonisations of Tamil homelands. Again, I have lost constituents who have

[John McDonnell]

been disappeared when they have gone out there. I campaigned for sanctions against the military junta in Myanmar to halt the attacks on the Rohingyas and to demand the freedom of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Yes, I have supported the boycott of goods coming from the Palestinian territories occupied illegally by Israel. The campaign in my constituency was undertaken by young people when the bombings in Gaza were killing young people there. In solidarity, young people in my constituency went round the local shops asking them to check where their goods were coming from and urging them not to sell goods from the occupied territories.

There has been some reference to BDS campaigns being associated with antisemitism. That is not what I have witnessed in my constituency, but if there is evidence that individuals associated with these campaigns are antisemitic, we already have laws to deal with that, and I believe that the full force of the law against racist behaviour should therefore be deployed.

More recently, I have called for sanctions against the Chinese Government for the barbaric treatment of the Uyghurs, and also because they have imprisoned a group of my Unite trade union friends who worked with me on the British Airways campaigns. All they were demanding was adherence to democracy by the Chinese, and they have been inside for two and a half years, without any form of access to their families in many instances.

The common factor in all those campaigns is that they would not have been supported by Government policy. Therefore, they would have been rendered illegal in their demand for action by public authorities to boycott, disinvest and sanction. I agree with the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) that there needs to be clarity about who is making foreign policy and what is being referred to, because actually the Bill makes the Secretary of State *ex cathedra*—infallible—and puts at his whim decisions about what is right and what is wrong across the globe, when Governments in this country have consistently got it significantly wrong. They have certainly not backed such campaigns and would have outlawed them overall.

All those campaigns have focused on pressing for action from Government, local councils, pension funds, private companies and investors. It is interesting that a few hon. Members have mentioned the focus on the local government pension fund. I declare an interest as a member of the local government pension fund, and I think it is up to members of the fund to determine its investment policies. I must say, as a constituency MP, that the campaigns have reflected the diversity of my constituency. There is not a campaign that has not involved a constituent or group of constituents or has not been asked for by my constituents. It is a matter of standing in solidarity.

The advice of every human rights lawyer I have spoken to so far, and all the briefings from human rights groups and trade unionists, have all made it clear that that range of activities will be outlawed and it will be made illegal for decision makers even to talk about the strategy. That is why I oppose the Bill. I am voting against it because we have heard today, right across the House,

that not a single clause has stood up to scrutiny. Therefore, I do not believe it can be amended; it is fundamentally flawed and should be defeated.

Let me make one final point, as an aside. We should change the Standing Orders or look at “Erskine May”, because it would have been useful if the Secretary of State coming here to present the Bill had actually read it or addressed the same Bill that we are addressing in this debate. All we saw today was a diatribe of the lowest politics we have seen for a long time, which divides our community unnecessarily and, to be frank, appallingly.

8.55 pm

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): Let me be absolutely clear that the Bill before this House, which should be rejected, is not just bad and unworkable but fundamentally flawed and dangerous. Hon. Members across the House have rightly stated that it does not just prevent public bodies such as local councils involving themselves in foreign policy—as the Government innocently declare—but meddles in the autonomy of local government pension schemes to make the best investment decisions, and swings a wrecking ball through the UK’s obligation to respect international law and countless United Nations resolutions.

The Bill undermines the ability of public bodies and civic society to divest from those who are harming our environment and driving climate change. It provides the Government with unprecedented and deeply alarming powers of enforcement that curtail freedom of expression and democracy by gagging public bodies that have the audacity to speak and act on their conscience. It forces public bodies and civic society to kneel, against their own moral convictions, to the Secretary of State’s foreign policy.

Most alarmingly, by preventing public bodies from adopting positions that deviate from this Government’s foreign policy of turning a blind eye to persecution, oppression and injustice in other countries, the Bill quashes the ability of those individuals, public bodies and members of civic society with any sense of humanity to take a stand against human rights abuses, at a time of rapid increase in those abuses right across the world.

Each of those reasons alone is enough to bin the Bill but, taken together, they make it not only one of the most far-reaching and dangerous pieces of legislation this Government have ever sought to make law, but one of the most repressive. That is why it must be struck down today.

As pointed out by hon. Members across the House, the Bill directly contradicts decades of established UK foreign policy on illegal Israeli settlements built on occupied land. It is astounding that it has to be repeated in this Chamber time and again that settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are illegal under international law. Why does the Bill not recognise that international position?

Instead of introducing legislation to Parliament that provides cover to the Netanyahu Government’s illegal annexation of Palestinian territory, Ministers must decide whether they agree with the established position of the rest of the international community that the settlements and the Israeli Government’s repeated disregard for international law are illegal. As hon. Members have stated, the Bill as it currently stands is in direct contravention of not just international law but United Nations resolutions.



Many of us fear the anti-democratic precedent the Bill will set. Effectively, if a human rights campaign does not enjoy the support of the Government, it will be criminalised for attempting to bring abuses to light. The Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the Rohingya in Burma, the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Kashmiris in Indian-occupied Kashmir—members of those communities, many of whom are resident in my constituency, have now had their fear doubled. Not only are they witnessing numerous human rights abuses in their countries of origin, they are now being silenced here, too. Indeed, until just recently the UK Government refused to approve sanctions against the Burmese military despite the horrific genocidal campaign it waged against the Rohingya, with Ministers declaring that they did not want to unbalance what existed of Burma's democratic Government. Instead, it was left to other organisations and groups to lead the resistance against a genocide taking place while the UK Government looked on. The Government are in a better place on that issue today, but we are still left with the question of what happens if there is a return to the same form of democratic Government in Burma that existed before and which allowed the Rohingya genocide to take place. It is clear that Ministers will lift sanctions and force local authorities to do the same through the Bill, leaving the perpetrators of genocide able to escape justice and accountability for their grave crimes against humanity.

The impact the Bill will have on human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir, where Kashmiris continue to face persecution, oppression and injustice is even more alarming, because it is in this region that UK foreign policy under this Tory Government is not only most unreliable but most spineless. Even as the Indian Government blatantly engage in violent, physical and psychological suppression of any resistance to the military occupation, however peaceful it may be, and seek to deter further opposition to their brutal rule by making an example of campaigners such as Yasin Malik, whose execution Indian prosecutors are now seeking, all the UK Government remain focused on is securing a trade deal with the right-wing Modi Government before the next general election. They could not even bring themselves to object to and boycott, as other countries did, the shameful decision to hold the G20 culture working group summit last month in Srinagar. In the absence of the UK Government stepping up to fulfil their historic, moral and international obligations to the region, it is once again left to local councils and public bodies to do what they can to protect human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir by refusing to engage with those whose hands are stained with the blood of Kashmiris. Yet under the Bill the Government will put a stop to that and force public bodies to be party to human rights abuses because they think it is in the UK's best foreign policy interests.

This rotten, unworkable and dangerous Bill is an alarming overreach of Government powers that breaks the UK's international obligations and undermines efforts to protect our environment and fight climate change. It protects human rights abusers in countless nations and gags democratically elected local representatives. We cannot pick and choose which human rights abuses to act on and which to turn a blind eye to. Let me be clear: human rights are a universal obligation and a universal right. It is time the UK Government accepted that. I will therefore be standing up, as I always have done,

for democracy, for our environment and for human rights by voting for today's amendment that will reject the Bill.

9.3 pm

**Beth Winter** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): On first reading the Bill, memories of my childhood came flooding back, when my family and I were very heavily involved in the South Africa anti-apartheid movement in Wales. That campaign deployed a range of campaign methods, including boycott, divestment and sanctions, and lobbying local councils to divest and use sanctions against South Africa. We campaigned and succeeded in stopping a local choir from touring South Africa, as well as boycotting goods. That was some of my formative political campaigning. It was legitimate, proportionate and all about challenging racism. It informs me on why I must oppose the Bill in its entirety.

This Bill is the latest example of the shrinking space for freedom of expression in the UK, following the passage of the Elections Act 2022, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023, and the continued progress of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill. Today's Bill is an attack on democracy and rides roughshod over democratically elected representatives at a local, regional and devolved level. It is the epitome of cancel culture that the right-wing culture warriors on the Conservative Benches complain about so bitterly. It really does, as others have said, contain a direct threat to freedom of speech by barring public authorities from taking action and, indeed, from even making statements of policy.

The Bill will assist the suppression of campaigns for justice and accountability across the globe on issues as wide ranging as pollution, the environment, exploitation of children and women, and fossil fuel divestment—the list goes on. I and others who have spoken out against this Bill are not alone in opposing it. A wide range of human rights organisations, lawyers, trade unions, charities, non-governmental organisations, faith groups, climate justice groups and cultural organisations share our concerns. And all of those would rightly reject the use of boycott tactics being used to stoke racism or antisemitism.

The Bill, as has been said, undermines elected local councils and regional Mayors by not allowing them to make decisions that they have been democratically elected to make. It also clearly and definitely undermines the devolved settlement. What consultation has been carried out with the Welsh Government and the other devolved nations? How will the Bill impact on the devolved nations' procurement policies, which are currently being pursued and are ethical and have human rights considerations at their heart?

It has already been highlighted how this Bill, while giving the Government broad-brush powers to prevent criticism of any state Government, uniquely privileges Israel. That is despite its repeated and escalating human rights abuses in the west bank and Gaza, and, as we are witnessing today, the horrific and heartbreaking events in Jenin. Despite assertions that foreign policy is unchanged, for the first time a piece of British legislation will require Israel and the territories it illegally occupies to be treated in the same way, departing from decades of international consensus on the illegality of settlements.

[Beth Winter]

There is a proud record of the use of boycotts in progressive struggles—from the sugar boycotts of slavery abolitionists in the 18th and 19th centuries, to the anti-apartheid boycotts of South Africa, divestment from fossil fuel companies and action against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Boycotts have been used legitimately, proportionately and often successfully to peacefully put political, economic or cultural pressure on a regime, institution or company to force it to change abusive, discriminatory or illegal policies. They have historically been anti-racist campaigns, and I believe that they must and will continue in the future.

I want to finish with a quote from Nelson Mandela, who came to Cardiff in 1998:

“When the call for international isolation of the forces of apartheid went out to the world, the people of Wales responded magnificently. The knowledge that local authorities all over Wales were banning apartheid products from canteens and schools...was a great inspiration to us in our struggle.”

I believe that he too would have said that those opposing this Bill in its entirety are on the right side of history. That is why I support the Labour Front-Bench position to decline a Second Reading, and as a matter of conscience I must oppose the Bill in its entirety. Diolch yn fawr.

9.9 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It has been a joy to hear the different opinions expressed in the Chamber today, both from those in favour of the Bill and from those against it. I have to say to my good friends, as I call them, sitting near me in the Chamber that my opinion differs from theirs, but that will not be a big surprise to them.

I am a well-known friend of Israel, and I make no apology for registering my interest and my support. Having said that, I know that it will—again—come as no surprise to any Member that I support the Bill, and, indeed, I said as much to the Secretary of State in an intervention earlier. The anti-Israel sentiment that flourishes in the absence of legislation must be addressed. I know that some Members who are present believe that the principle of boycotting has been used effectively for years, recalling the boycott of German goods, and I know of many a person who has boycotted a company in opposition to a decision or policy in that company. However, it is not the job of universities or other Government-funded bodies to make the decision to boycott for a political reason without an outright decision in this place, which is why the Bill is before us tonight. While some may also believe that only a principle is being debated today, the fact is that there is an active boycott against Israel in some political circles, and it does have an effect.

Let me give some examples from Northern Ireland. In 2014, the Sinn Féin mayor of what was then Newry and Mourne Council wrote to shopkeepers in the council district requiring them to inform him about all the Israeli goods that they stocked. In his capacity as mayor, he told local businesses in Newry that unless they immediately withdrew Israeli goods from sale, they were giving “financial support, succour and legitimacy”

to “apartheid” and racism. Well, no, they were not. Those receiving the letter from the mayor—local shopkeepers and business people—understandably felt targeted, and some said that the letter struck them as deeply sinister, intimidating and extremely divisive.

This boycott is clearly racially motivated, which is underlined by debates taking place on the Israel issue. In a Belfast City Council debate on Israel in 2019, Israel was presented by nationalist and Marxist councillors as a unique evil in the world, requiring unique measures to be taken against it. People Before Profit councillors referred to Israel’s establishment and existence as a racist endeavour. Well, no, it is not, but they said that it was. The reality of any conflict in the middle east was denied; it was only their perceived Jewish oppression of Arabs. Concerns expressed about growing antisemitism were shamelessly deflected and ridiculed; it was just a deliberate tactic to silence criticism of Israel. It was suggested by some councillors that only Jews who held anti-Zionist positions deserved the council’s solidarity, a view that is perpetuated by the boycott of Israeli goods on a global scale in which this nation has been a silent partner for so long. That is why the Bill is so important.

Let me be clear: Israel’s existence and survival are vital to many in our Jewish community as a matter of their core identity, religious faith, family connections and sense of physical safety and security. Criticism of an Israeli Government or policy is one thing; demonisation of Israel as a unique evil, along with demands for the Jewish state’s elimination from the face of the earth, is quite another. Demonisation, boycotts and expulsions directed against the world’s only Jewish state do not sit well with me or with my colleagues, and, indeed, should not sit well with any member of this House. Local authorities in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, should be working hard to support diversity and good relations, not isolating and undermining one of our smallest and much-cherished communities.

Recently, a media outlet in Northern Ireland published a letter from a self-styled interfaith group identifying the leadership of Ireland’s tiny Jewish community with genocide and apartheid in the middle east. Well, no, they do not do that. The letter called on the 80 Jews in Belfast to support their “moderate” aim of bringing down the Zionist regime. To put it starkly, this is where the so-called BDS campaign will lead if it is never properly called out and challenged: it will lead to the targeting and isolation of not just the Jewish state, but those of us—and I am one—who consider ourselves friends of Israel, including many members of our Jewish community.

Let me give some more examples in the last couple of minutes available to me. Family businesses in Northern Ireland, such as Wilson’s Country Ltd, were subjected to a vicious attack on social media because they stocked Israeli new potatoes. An Israeli-owned stall at CastleCourt in Belfast was regularly physically attacked, and its staff intimidated. Some of these attacks were so serious that they led to custodial sentences. The stall was forced to close and has never returned.

Staff at the Linen Hall library in Belfast complained of online bullying after it hosted an event celebrating the centenary of Chaim Herzog’s birth in Belfast. Library staff were harangued.

During the conflict in the middle east, Belfast’s synagogue had its windows smashed and the community’s rabbi received threats and needed escorts to and from the synagogue. The community has frequently been targeted by online abuse.

A County Tyrone sports personality with an online following tweeted, “If you’re lucky enough to know a Jew, punch him in the face.” The PSNI is investigating. Pubgoers in the Bogside were recorded by an undercover Israeli reporter telling him, “Jews are the scum of the earth. Hitler didn’t kill enough of them.” The PSNI is investigating.

There were calls to cancel a friendly football match between Northern Ireland and Israel. The Israeli national team is more diverse than any other team in the world, because it includes Jews, Muslims and Christians. Again, the line of abuse is incredible.

My last example is from 2016, when Derry City and Strabane District Council claimed to be the first local authority in Northern Ireland to pass a motion boycotting Israeli goods. In 2018, the same council voted that to have a Friends of Israel representative speak to the council to put their side of the case would be a disgrace to the city. It did not want to hear the other side of the argument. The voice of freedom and free speech was not heard.

I will not be siding with the threat of expulsions, boycotts and isolation. I therefore welcome this Bill, which will prevent our local authorities from being abused in this extreme and divisive manner. We in Northern Ireland have seen more of that than most.

9.16 pm

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to close this challenging but important debate on behalf of the Opposition. The debate has covered Britain’s place in the world, freedom of speech, human rights, genocide and a whole range of other important topics.

At the heart of the debate lies a central question: does the Bill balance legitimate, strongly held and well-meant desires to challenge behaviours overseas on principled grounds against important protections for particular nations or regions in the face of disproportionate treatment? I am afraid the answer is no.

We believe there should be legislation to frame boycott and divestment-type activities—legislation that allows communities to decide where their money goes—in response to human rights or genocide concern, while ensuring such decisions are made equitably and consistently so that the world’s only Jewish state, for example, is not singled out and targeted. This is consistent with our long-held stance against the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel.

Colleagues can have confidence that we believe in such framing legislation, because the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), and I tabled such amendments to the Procurement Bill in Committee, some months ago, and on Report. The amendments were rejected by the Government, but the Bill tabled in their stead, the Bill before us, is considerably worse than the option we offered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) called the Bill a “dog’s dinner.” He is generally not a man to disappoint, but his sentiment was one of disappointment, which was echoed in the remarkable contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), who spoke of the frustration of those, including the hon.

Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak, who want to see legislation that the House can unite behind. We do not have that currently.

There has been a range of other excellent contributions. The Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), referenced clause 3(7), as did my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and the hon. Member for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond). This subsection breaks the distinction between the state of Israel and the occupied territories, which is a significant change in Government policy, and it asks significant questions about our compliance with UN resolutions. The Minister must account for that change of policy and assuage some of those concerns in her summing up.

The right hon. Members for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Sir Simon Clarke) and for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) said that foreign policy matters of this nature are not for local decision makers. Well, we do not think that is right. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) made a very strong argument about how it has worked and been effective in his community in the past. In a bolder argument, the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) rightly said that it is our communities’ money. I, like many colleagues, am a member of the local government pension scheme—that is our money; and I am a council tax payer—that is our money. It is not unreasonable that we might want to have a say in how it is spent.

**Nadia Whittome:** This Bill is anti-democratic and anti-human rights. It frustrates peace efforts in the middle east and it is an obstacle to social justice everywhere. As such, it has been condemned by a huge range of civil society organisations, including trade unions, charities and faith organisations. Does my hon. Friend agree with them and with me that for those reasons the Bill must not receive a Second Reading?

**Alex Norris:** Yes, I think that what has been striking is that colleagues who come at this from very different places and parties have reached that conclusion of the inadequacy of this legislation. I hope the Government will reflect on that. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) asked what our alternative was. The hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) made a powerful contribution, but I slightly challenge his suggestion that we were saying that we should rip this up in an unspecified way. That is not the point we are making. We are saying that we tabled an amendment to the Procurement Bill that we think is better. If the Government think it is technically inadequate, we would be happy to work with them to improve it. What we do know is that it is much better than what is before us today.

My hon. Friends the Members for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) and for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) made important points about what this Bill does to the devolved regional and national settlements—it challenges and presses them greatly. The right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and the hon. Members for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made powerful anti-BDS cases. I hope the position that my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) and I have taken on that assuages some concerns. My hon. Friend the Member for Strangford is my friend and we should always be



[Alex Norris]

honest with our friends, so let me say that he has done peerless work in this place on tackling the persecution of Christians abroad and he should have real concerns about how this legislation would fetter such activities in the future.

I will cover some more of the contributions as I get through the rest of my points, but certain concerns must be addressed by the Minister in her closing remarks. First, which of the two possible readings of clause 1 do the Government intend? Does the “territorial consideration” provision mean that not wishing to procure from Xinjiang is unacceptable but that not wishing to procure from the entire nation of China would be acceptable? Or does it mean that all actions of all foreign Governments are beyond the scope of local decision makers? How, at this stage, can it be satisfactory that there is ambiguity? As we have heard, this is legislation that will head straight to the courts. Secondly, to accept clause 3 is to exalt the Secretary of State ahead of any other public representative, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said. It is to set aside the mandates of the Mayor of the West Midlands, the Mayor of Greater Manchester or of the leaders of councils in favour of the Secretary of State. It is to give that person, whoever they may be, sole arbitration of human rights abuses, of genocide. That should give all of us pause, but it is worsened by clause 4, the gagging clause, which my hon. Friends the Members for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott), for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson), for Leeds East (Richard Burgon)—

**Sam Tarry** (Ilford South) (Lab): We heard a powerful and compelling contribution from my neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking, about pernicious political thinking behind this Bill. Does my hon. Friend agree that that has happened multiple times? We are talking about a smackdown on democracy. We had the so-called “gagging Bill”, which was about gagging charities and became the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014; in 2016, we had the wrapping up of trade unions in even more red tape; and, recently, we have had more attacks on trade unions and the right to protest. Are the Government not crushing dissent on the part of any organisation or body that wants to challenge them?

**Alex Norris:** I am grateful for that intervention. My hon. Friend almost reads to the end of my paragraph, so I will address that point presently. The point on gagging clauses was also made by my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds East and for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), and the hon. Members for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds). The Bill means that not only does the judgment of the Secretary of State supersede any and all local leaders, but the Government seek to ensure that those leaders are not even allowed to talk about their desire to challenge human rights abuses or not to consume settlement goods. The Government are taking away not only the right to act, but the ability to speak. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Sam Tarry) says, that is consistent with a legislative programme designed to whittle away at the civic space, with the Trade Union Act 2016, the 2014 Act, the Public Order Act 2023 and more. What we have in front of us is an unacceptable fetter on free expression.

Separately, but no less importantly, the Bill will, as the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) said, have consequences for billions of pounds in local government pension funds. Any hard deadline that is imposed on them to change their operations in accordance with new law could be deeply destabilising, and the Minister ought to talk about how much she has looked into that impact. We know that at the moment a pension fund makes a divestment decision on a financial ground that relates to territories named in the Bill, that decision will be challenged in the court as a moral judgment. That will bind up our pension funds in court case after court case.

Let me turn to an issue that has had little airing in the debate so far and will have a lot more to run. Through clause 7, the Bill permits extraordinary powers to compel information—powers that demolish long-held legal privileges. It is not proportionate to hand to the Secretary of State even stronger powers to compel information from public bodies than the security services have. Surely the Government see the unsustainability of that position. As detailed by Labour and other colleagues, these are weighty concerns that make the Bill unacceptable in its current form.

But there is an alternative, as covered in our reasoned amendment. Our country has a proud history in the development of modern international humanitarian law, from the ashes of world war two to the creation of the United Nations and the role that we continue to play on the world stage. We have always defended the fundamental and inalienable rights of all human beings. It is vital that procurement decisions made in respect of such rights are then applied across the board to prevent unethical actions against specific states and to ensure that common actions have the greatest impact. That could be readily achieved by requiring public bodies to produce a document that sets out their policy on procurement and human rights, and for that to be developed in accordance with guidance published by the Secretary of State. That would ensure consistency in how contracting authorities decide on such matters.

What would that suggestion mean in practice? The practical effect would be to make it clear and unambiguous that if a public body does not wish to procure goods from Russia because of President Putin’s abhorrent human rights abuses in Ukraine, the law will be on its side. If that same body does not wish to procure services from Xinjiang because of the appalling treatment of Uyghur Muslims, the law will be on its side. But if a public body acts only against a particular state—let us say the world’s only Jewish state—while turning a blind eye to human rights abuses elsewhere, such actions would be illegal. We offer this workable solution to the Government and I hope the Minister picks it up. If colleagues do not hear that in the Minister’s response, I encourage them to vote in favour of the reasoned amendment tabled in my name and the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

9.27 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan):** I thank Members from throughout the House for their impassioned and heartfelt contributions. Let me remind the House why we have introduced this legislation: we believe that we should have one foreign policy, and we also believe

that BDS campaigns risk undermining community cohesion. We believe that public bodies should not be wasting time and money on pursuing their own foreign policy agendas and should instead focus on providing vital public services and delivering value for money for the taxpayer in their procurement and investment decisions.

Let me also clarify certain misapprehensions that certain Members have about the Bill. First, the Bill applies only to public authorities. It does not apply to private individuals or private companies, except if they are exercising public functions. It does not place restrictions on local councillors, except when they talk expressly on the behalf of their local authority. It does not prevent public authorities from making statements on foreign policy; it prevents them only from making a procurement or investment decision if it is motivated by moral or political disapproval of a foreign state's conduct.

Many Members have mentioned clause 4. I reassure Members that clause 4 only prevents public authorities from making statements of intent to boycott or divest. It does not prevent public bodies from disagreeing with this legislation. The Bill does not ban ethical, religious or socially conscious funds, so, for instance, climate change funds can continue with the Bill unless there are issues that are country-specific.

A number of Members mentioned clause 3(7). I want to clarify the role of the clause. The Bill applies equally to all countries. Countries can be exempted from the ban by secondary legislation, which is what we are planning to do with Russia and Belarus—[*Interruption.*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. This has been a very good-natured and difficult debate. It has been held with disagreement, but courtesy across the House. People have now come into the Chamber who have not been here during the debate and it is most discourteous of them now to make so much noise that we cannot hear the Minister. That is bad behaviour and it is bad for the way in which we do things in here, especially on a day when we have had a very well-constructed and conducted debate.

**Felicity Buchan:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Given the focus of the BDS campaign on Israel, we are simply saying in this clause that, for Israel to be exempted from the legislation, it will require primary legislation. I want to make that very clear. This policy does not affect our foreign policy position. We are not legislating for the UK's foreign policy on Israel or on any other country in the Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to ensure a consistent approach to foreign policy across our public bodies, led by the UK Government. The Bill will not prevent the UK Government from imposing sanctions, or otherwise changing our foreign policy on any country in future.

I stress that none of the provisions in the Bill changes the UK's position on Israeli settlements in the west bank and the Golan Heights. We are continuing to urge Israel not to take steps that move us away from our shared goals of peace and security. We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states and a just, fair and realistic settlement for refugees.

Furthermore, our position on settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law; present an obstacle to peace; and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. Our position is reflected in our continued support for UN Security Council resolution 2334, with which the Bill is compliant.

**Richard Graham:** What the Minister says is not really what is reflected in the Bill because a specific exemption is given not just to Israel, in what should be a country-agnostic Bill—just like our manifesto commitment—but to two parts of Israel which we do not recognise as part of Israel under international law. Therefore, there is specifically an exemption for Israel. Does she agree—the Secretary of State said earlier that he would listen very carefully to suggested amendments—that this is something that needs to be worked on during the Bill Committee?

**Felicity Buchan:** UN Security Council resolution 2334 asks countries to differentiate between Israel and the occupied territories. We have done that in this clause; they are clearly separated out in different paragraphs. However, as the Secretary of State said in his opening remarks, we are open to any discussions on the Bill and of course we want the best legislation here.

**Alicia Kearns rose—**

**Felicity Buchan:** I am very conscious that, in the interests of time, I only have a few minutes.

**Alicia Kearns:** My hon. Friend knows the incredibly high esteem I hold her in, but it just is not credible to keep repeating that this does not change how we treat the Golan Heights, which have been annexed, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Foreign Office's own legal advice states that the Bill could breach UNSC 2334. How am I being told repeatedly from the Dispatch Box that that is not the case, when that is what Government lawyers are saying themselves? We have a responsibility to uphold that resolution. We drafted this legislation and therefore we need to remove clause 3(7). We on these Back Benches have offered a landing platform to the Government: "Remove that clause. You can still do this." But please do not repeat that this does not change anything when the Government lawyers themselves say it does.

**Felicity Buchan:** The Government's view is that the Bill is compliant with UN Security Council resolution 2334.

I move on to the reasoned amendment, which rightly recognises the impact that boycotts and divestment campaigns can have on undermining community cohesion. The Government, however, are resisting the amendment on the basis that this legislation is a robust and proportionate means of stopping public bodies engaging in divisive campaigns and of fulfilling our 2019 manifesto commitment. The amendment refers specifically to the Uyghur Muslims. This Government are concerned about the issue of Uyghur forced labour in supply chains and are taking robust action. The exceptions in this Bill, alongside the exclusion grounds in the Procurement Bill, will keep suppliers involved in labour market misconduct, including human trafficking and modern slavery, no matter where they are in the world, out of public sector supply chains.

[Felicity Buchan]

We have already discussed the point on the occupied territories and the Golan Heights. The amendment claims that this Bill limits freedom of speech, but that is not the case. Private individuals and bodies are not affected by the legislation. The right to freedom of speech is protected by article 10 of the European convention on human rights and the Government remain strongly committed to the UK's long and proud tradition of freedom of speech.

The amendment also criticises the powers given to the Secretary of State to enforce this ban. Far from being the unprecedented powers claimed, they are modelled on existing powers of regulators such as the Office for Students and the Pensions Regulator. It would simply not be logical to impose a ban with a toothless enforcement regime.

This legislation delivers an important manifesto commitment. It will ensure that the UK has a consistent foreign policy approach and speaks with one voice internationally. I look forward to working with hon. Members throughout the Bill's passage to deliver this important legislation and to continuing engagement on the issues that hon. Members have raised in the House today. I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put*, That the amendment be made.

*The House divided*: Ayes 212, Noes 272.

**Division No. 277]**

**[9.38 pm**

**AYES**

Abrahams, Debbie  
Ali, Tahir  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Anderson, Fleur  
Ashworth, rh Jonathan  
Bardell, Hannah  
Barker, Paula  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Begum, Apsana  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blake, Olivia  
Blomfield, Paul  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bonnar, Steven  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brown, Alan  
Brown, Ms Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bryant, Sir Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burgon, Richard  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, Ian  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Carden, Dan  
Chamberlain, Wendy  
Champion, Sarah  
Cherry, Joanna  
Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)

Cooper, Daisy  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Cowan, Ronnie  
Coyle, Neil  
Creasy, Stella  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cunningham, Alex  
Daby, Janet  
Dalton, Ashley  
David, Wayne  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
De Cordova, Marsha  
Debbonaire, Thangam  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Dixon, Samantha  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Doogan, Dave  
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
Doughty, Stephen  
Dowd, Peter  
Eagle, rh Maria  
Eastwood, Colum  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Elmore, Chris  
Eshalomi, Florence  
Evans, Chris  
Farron, Tim  
Farry, Stephen  
Fellows, Marion  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flynn, Stephen  
Foord, Richard  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky

Furniss, Gill  
Gardiner, Barry  
Gibson, Patricia  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Grady, Patrick  
Grant, Peter  
Green, Sarah  
Greenwood, Lillian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Dame Nia  
Haigh, Louise  
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette  
Hanna, Claire  
Hardy, Emma  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Healey, rh John  
Hendry, Drew  
Hillier, Dame Meg  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hollern, Kate  
Hopkins, Rachel  
Hosie, rh Stewart  
Howarth, rh Sir George  
Hussain, Imran  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
Jones, Ruth  
Jones, Sarah  
Kane, Mike  
Keeley, Barbara  
Kendall, Liz  
Khan, Afzal  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Lake, Ben  
Lammy, rh Mr David  
Lavery, Ian  
Law, Chris  
Leadbeater, Kim  
Lewis, Clive  
Linden, David  
Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
Lynch, Holly  
MacAskill, Kenny  
MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Malhotra, Seema  
Maskell, Rachael  
Dowd, Peter  
McCabe, Steve  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonnell, rh John  
McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
McMahon, Jim  
McMorrin, Anna  
Mearns, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Mishra, Navendu  
Monaghan, Carol  
Moran, Layla  
Morgan, Helen  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Murray, Ian  
Murray, James  
Nandy, Lisa  
Newlands, Gavin  
Nichols, Charlotte  
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
Norris, Alex  
O'Hara, Brendan  
Olney, Sarah  
Onwurah, Chi  
Oppong-Asare, Abena  
Osamor, Kate  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Owen, Sarah  
Peacock, Stephanie  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Mr Toby  
Phillips, Jess  
Phillipson, Bridget  
Pollard, Luke  
Powell, Lucy  
Qaisar, Ms Anum  
Qureshi, Yasmin  
Rayner, rh Angela  
Rees, Christina  
Reeves, rh Rachel  
Rimmer, Ms Marie  
Rodda, Matt  
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Sheppard, Tommy  
Siddiq, Tulip  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Jeff  
Smith, Nick  
Stephens, Chris  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tarry, Sam  
Thomas, Gareth  
Thomson, Richard  
Thornberry, rh Emily  
Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
Twist, Liz  
Vaz, rh Valerie  
Wakeford, Christian  
Webbe, Claudia  
West, Catherine  
Western, Andrew  
Western, Matt  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Whitley, Mick  
Whittome, Nadia  
Williams, Hywel  
Wilson, Munira  
Winter, Beth  
Wishart, Pete  
Wragg, Mr William  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

**Tonia Antoniazzi and  
Mary Glindon**



## NOES

Afolami, Bim  
 Aiken, Nickie  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Bailey, Shaun  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Baynes, Simon  
 Bell, Aaron  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Bhatti, Saqib (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Bone, Mr Peter (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Browne, Anthony  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buchan, Felicity  
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, rh Sir Conor  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Carter, Andy  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Cates, Miriam  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, rh Alex  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon  
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
 Clarkson, Chris  
 Cleverly, rh James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Colburn, Elliot  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Coutinho, Claire  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crosbie, Virginia  
 Daly, James  
 Davies, rh David T. C.  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Dr James

Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davison, Dehenna  
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
 Dines, Miss Sarah  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Double, Steve  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, Sir James  
 Duguid, David  
 Eastwood, Mark  
 Edwards, Ruth  
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Everitt, Ben  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Farris, Laura  
 Fell, Simon  
 Firth, Anna  
 Fletcher, Katherine  
 Fletcher, Mark  
 Fletcher, Nick  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, rh Lucy  
 Freer, Mike  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gibson, Peter  
 Gideon, Jo  
 Glen, rh John  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Grundy, James  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Sally-Ann  
 Hart, rh Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heapey, rh James  
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Henry, Darren  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Holden, Mr Richard  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Howell, John  
 Howell, Paul  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, Jane  
 Hunt, Tom  
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil

Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkinson, Mark  
 Jenkyns, Dame Andrea  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnston, David  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, Fay  
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus  
 Jupp, Simon  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, rh Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lamont, John  
 Langan, Robert  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Sir Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Loder, Chris  
 Longhi, Marco  
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackrory, Cherylyn  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McPartland, rh Stephen  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, rh Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Millar, Robin  
 Miller, rh Dame Maria  
 Milling, rh Dame Amanda  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Morton, rh Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mumby-Croft, Holly  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, rh Chris

Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, rh Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok  
 Simmonds, David  
 Smith, rh Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunderland, James  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vara, rh Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, rh Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Joy Morrissey and  
 Mike Wood

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)),  
That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 70.*

**Division No. 278]**

**[9.53 pm**

**AYES**

Afolami, Bim  
Aiken, Nickie  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast  
by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Ansell, Caroline  
Argar, rh Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Bailey, Shaun  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, rh Steve  
Baynes, Simon  
Bell, Aaron  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Bhatti, Saqib (*Proxy vote cast  
by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
Blackman, Bob  
Bone, Mr Peter (*Proxy vote  
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buchan, Felicity  
Burghart, Alex  
Burns, rh Sir Conor  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carter, Andy  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, rh Alex  
Chope, Sir Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Sir Simon  
Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast  
by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Cleverly, rh James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
Colburn, Elliot  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Coutinho, Claire  
Crabb, rh Stephen

Crosbie, Virginia  
Daly, James  
Davies, rh David T. C.  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Dr James  
Davies, Mims  
Davies, Philip  
Davison, Dehenna  
Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy  
vote cast by Mr Marcus  
Jones*)  
Double, Steve  
Duddridge, Sir James  
Duguid, David  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Sir Michael  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farris, Laura  
Fell, Simon  
Firth, Anna  
Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
Freer, Mike  
French, Mr Louie  
Fysh, Mr Marcus  
Garnier, Mark  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Peter  
Gideon, Jo  
Glen, rh John  
Gove, rh Michael  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Grundy, James  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, Stephen  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hart, rh Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heapey, rh James  
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Holden, Mr Richard

Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Holmes, Paul  
Howell, John  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, Tom  
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Jenkyns, Dame Andrea  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnston, David  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, rh Mr Marcus  
Jupp, Simon  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Keegan, rh Gillian  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Kruger, Danny  
Lamont, John  
Largan, Robert  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon  
Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Loder, Chris  
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast  
by Mr Marcus Jones*)  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mackrory, Cherylyn  
Macleane, Rachel  
Mak, Alan  
Mangnall, Anthony  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
Mayhew, Jerome  
Maynard, Paul  
McPartland, rh Stephen  
McVey, rh Esther  
Menzies, Mark  
Mercer, rh Johnny  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Millar, Robin  
Miller, rh Dame Maria  
Milling, rh Dame Amanda  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Damien  
Moore, Robbie  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Mortimer, Jill  
Morton, rh Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mumby-Croft, Holly  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Neill, Sir Robert  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, rh Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Patel, rh Priti  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Percy, Andrew  
Philp, rh Chris  
Poulter, Dr Dan  
Pow, Rebecca  
Pursglove, Tom  
Quin, rh Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Randall, Tom  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob  
Richards, Nicola  
Richardson, Angela  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Robinson, Gavin  
Robinson, Mary  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Russell, Dean  
Saxby, Selaine  
Scully, Paul  
Seely, Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Sharma, rh Sir Alok  
Simmonds, David  
Smith, rh Chloe  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, Henry  
Smith, rh Julian  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stafford, Alexander  
Stevenson, Jane  
Stewart, Iain  
Stuart, rh Graham  
Sturdy, Julian  
Sunderland, James  
Syms, Sir Robert  
Thomas, Derek  
Throup, Maggie  
Timpson, Edward  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tomlinson, Michael  
Tracey, Craig  
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
Trott, Laura  
Tugendhat, rh Tom  
Vara, rh Shailesh  
Vickers, Martin  
Vickers, Matt  
Villiers, rh Theresa  
Walker, Sir Charles  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Warman, Matt  
Watling, Giles  
Webb, Suzanne  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
Whittaker, rh Craig  
Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
Wiggin, Sir Bill  
Wild, James  
Williams, Craig  
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin

Wilson, rh Sammy  
Young, Jacob  
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Joy Morrissey and**  
**Mike Wood**

#### NOES

Bardell, Hannah  
Begum, Apsana  
Black, Mhairi  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bonnar, Steven  
Brown, Alan  
Butler, Dawn  
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Chamberlain, Wendy  
Chapman, Douglas  
Cherry, Joanna  
Cooper, Daisy  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Cowan, Ronnie  
Day, Martyn  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Doogan, Dave  
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast*  
*by Brendan O'Hara*)  
Eastwood, Colum  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Farron, Tim  
Farry, Stephen  
Flynn, Stephen  
Foord, Richard  
Gardiner, Barry  
Gibson, Patricia  
Grady, Patrick  
Green, Sarah  
Hanna, Claire  
Hendry, Drew  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hosie, rh Stewart  
Lake, Ben  
Lavery, Ian

Law, Chris  
Linden, David  
Lucas, Caroline  
MacAskill, Kenny  
Mc Nally, John  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonnell, rh John  
McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
Mearns, Ian  
Monaghan, Carol  
Moran, Layla  
Morgan, Helen  
Morris, Grahame  
Newlands, Gavin  
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote*  
*cast by Brendan O'Hara*)  
O'Hara, Brendan  
Olney, Sarah  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Qaisar, Ms Anum  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Sheppard, Tommy  
Stephens, Chris  
Thomson, Richard  
Webbe, Claudia  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Whitley, Mick  
Williams, Hywel  
Wilson, Munira  
Winter, Beth  
Wishart, Pete  
Wragg, Mr William

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Marion Fellows and**  
**Peter Grant**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*  
*Bill read a Second time.*

#### ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC BODIES (OVERSEAS MATTERS) BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill:

##### *Committal*

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

*Proceedings in Public Bill Committee*

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 14 September 2023.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

#### *Consideration and Third Reading*

(4) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

##### *Other proceedings*

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—  
(*Scott Mann.*)

*Question agreed to.*

#### ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC BODIES (OVERSEAS MATTERS) BILL (MONEY)

*King's recommendation signified.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(a) any expenditure incurred under the Act by the Secretary of State or by the Treasury; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under or by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided.—  
(*Scott Mann.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### Business without Debate

#### DEFERRED DIVISIONS

*Ordered,*

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Secretary Michael Gove relating to Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill: Carry-Over.—(*Scott Mann.*)

#### ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC BODIES (OVERSEAS MATTERS) BILL (CARRY-OVER)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 80A(1)(a)),* That if, at the conclusion of this Session of Parliament, proceedings on the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill have not been completed, they shall be resumed in the next Session.—(*Scott Mann.*)

*Question agreed to.*

#### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

##### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

That the draft Healthcare (International Arrangements) (EU Exit) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 5 June, be approved.

##### INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft International Atomic Energy Agency (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 2023, which was laid before this House on 5 June, be approved.—(*Scott Mann.*)

*Question agreed to.*



## Crime and Antisocial Behaviour: West London

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

10.7 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to lead this debate on crime and antisocial behaviour in west London. I am pleased that this debate comes so soon after my most recent crime survey for residents. We had more than 300 responses this time, and the results were sadly more shocking, more worrying and more concerning than those from our last survey in 2019.

While the title of the debate covers west London, I know that the experiences and challenges we face in my constituency are felt across London and the whole of England. I want to discuss four central themes today: my constituents' own experience with crime, based mainly on my recent constituent crime survey; the responses of the Metropolitan police; the response of the Government; and, finally, what we can and should do to tackle crime and keep people safe.

I could have started this debate by reeling off a long list of figures and statistics about crime and policing, but I will not. Debates about crime are not abstract. It is not a line on a bar chart, but so much more. It is often a life shattered, confidence taken away and a hole left behind. Take one constituent who contacted me after a string of car thefts outside their home. They told me:

"We are scared to walk outside alone, we are scared to wear a watch, we are scared for the safety of our children."

That is what crime does.

Crime has an acidic and poisonous impact on communities, whether that is cars being violently stolen outside of houses, homes being broken into, schoolchildren being mugged at knifepoint or young people afraid of getting involved and being sucked into gang activity.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Does she agree that it is a wake-up call when children tell their mums they are afraid to walk home through the high street after school? That is taking away their childhoods.

**Ruth Cadbury**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Children are afraid of being the victims of crime. They are also afraid of the gangs. Too many parents and young children are being targeted and, once sucked in, if they do not have the money to pay the gangs back, it is difficult to get out. I will come to that later.

The fear that crime puts into victims lasts so much longer than the time taken to experience and report the crime itself. Something wider has also emerged in recent years: a sense of broken Britain. People tell me of seeing drugs being dealt openly in plain sight, bike theft and phone theft becoming virtually legal due to the lack of policing response, and fraud and cyber-crime becoming more and more widespread. There is a sense that this is a country where certain forms of crime simply happen without any consequence. Recently, even calling 999 was a futile gesture that led nowhere.

I will touch briefly on the responses I received to my recent constituency crime survey. Of those who responded, 35% had been victims of crime in the last 12 months. The most common thefts were vehicle theft and catalytic converter theft. West London is at particular risk because of the A4 and M4 passing through, which allows for a quick getaway. For years, I have been raising the issue of catalytic converter theft with the Home Office. As we know, they are stolen to order and passed on for the valuable materials they contain. One of the many policing Ministers told me that the Government would consider a review of the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 if necessary. Will the Minister tell me whether the Home Office is doing that review? If so, when will we hear of any likely action? His script might mention the national vehicle crime working group, which apparently meets regularly, but will he tell the House how it measures its outcomes?

In my survey, the top three areas of priority for constituents were burglaries, violent and sexual crimes, and drug-related crimes. Antisocial behaviour was also frequently brought up, and it is also raised when I meet constituents, although the phrase rather obscures just what that crime is. Whether it is constant fly-tipping on estates, long-running harassment campaigns against neighbours or illegally modified bikes speeding through parks, it feeds into the sense of hopeless and powerless and the sense that our justice system is simply not working as it should.

**Seema Malhotra**: My hon. Friend is being generous in giving way. Does she agree that when residents contact us, contact the police and contact others for help, they have the feeling that the answers are there but those who should be helping them—local authorities and the police in particular—are not responding and not joining up to ensure swift action and cutting this off so that residents and communities can live in safety?

**Ruth Cadbury**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The problem with antisocial behaviour is that it is often dealt with as "no crime". It is true that there are more serious crimes that need to be dealt with, but, for so many, antisocial behaviour feels like the thin end of the wedge.

There is a thread connecting these crimes that impact on all of our constituents, and ASB in particular: the sense that they are allowed to happen in plain sight. There is an assumption that the police are at the core of the solution. In some ways, they are.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing the debate. She is describing something familiar to all of us in west London. In the post-covid period, there has been a rapid increase in antisocial behaviour, vehicle crime and drug-related crime. I have an active local authority that has more CCTV cameras per head of population than any other in the country and which has employed 70 law enforcement officers of its own. What is missing is the neighbourhood policing that we used to have that reassured local communities and gathered intelligence. That really did make a contribution to both reassurance and keeping crime down, and that is what we need back.

**Ruth Cadbury**: I agree. We remember the time in the noughties when we had five officers for every ward, but they have been cut to less than half that.

Let me talk about the role of the Metropolitan police. I am grateful for my regular meetings with Chief Superintendent Wilson and other inspectors in Hounslow, and for the fact that Commissioner Mark Rowley has met London MPs frequently, including last week. In Hounslow, I have been on a walkabout both in Osterley and in Isleworth, and in a response car all around my constituency. I have had the chance to see just how well local officers know our community and how hard they work.

However, there is a huge gap between those positive experiences and the wider services provided by the Met, as we know from both the Casey report and the experiences of our constituents. I am well aware of the work that Metropolitan Commissioner Mark Rowley is doing to try to turn around the appalling prejudices of a number of police officers and the generic responses that all victims of crime get, so that people have some confidence in the core service. We look forward to seeing significant progress on that before too long.

Many residents, constituents and businesses have told me that when they have reported crimes, they receive either not a proper response or no response at all. They get a crime reference number—that is it. A crime reference number is not justice served. That is Commissioner Mark Rowley's task. The lack of response feeds into the sense of powerless and unfairness. People want the police to investigate, catch the criminals and stop crime from reoccurring. Mark Rowley has promised to turn around the ship and restore trust in the Met. That trust needs to be rebuilt urgently.

I want to focus on the Conservative Government, who have overseen the last 13 years of broken promises on policing across England. First, there was the decision to cut 20,000 experienced police officers. In London, more than 2,000 were cut, and in Hounslow borough, 80 experienced officers were cut. They knew their communities and knew the appropriate response to ensure that information was gathered and conflict situations were not escalated. Those experienced officers have, too often, gone.

**Seema Malhotra:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the way in which the cuts took place and police were taken from our communities has had an impact on the relationship between the police and our residents? The loss of knowledge of people, their lives and communities, and those in our schools, has had an impact on that trust and familiarity, which go such a long way to preventing crime and giving reassurance.

**Ruth Cadbury:** My hon. Friend explains so clearly the points that we made back then when the cuts were being made. When I was deputy leader of Hounslow council, we said that the cuts would have consequences, and my hon. Friend just described them perfectly. So, what has happened? The Government have realised that they made a mistake, and are providing funding to re-recruit those vacancies. However, recruiting is difficult. The experience has gone out the door. Getting new people in involves cost and training, and it takes years for knowledge to be built up. There are not the number of keen, competent and experienced recruits the Metropolitan police so badly needs, particularly from within London.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said, ward teams were cut from five or six police officers and police community support officers,

down to one or two per ward. The police have told me that they still do not have the numbers to carry out regular, high-profile foot patrols in at-risk areas. That is what people desperately want to see, but Conservative cuts have made it impossible. In parallel to the cuts were the swingeing cuts to local government and other key frontline services: Sure Start centres, play areas, parks, public health, social workers, schools and colleges—all areas that form the soft safety net.

Local groups have had to fill the gap. One group I have worked with is Action Isleworth Mothers. It is just one of many community groups across west London working tirelessly to support families, in particular young people at risk of being exploited by gangs. For three years Astrid Edwards, who founded AIM, has been working unpaid with mothers and their sons to support them in keeping away, or getting away, from gangs. She cannot do that alone. She has worked hard, using a progressive public health approach, to ensure key agencies in the borough—schools, the police, social services, housing, mental health and youth offender services—get out of their silos and work together. After three years of doing that unfunded, AIM now has funding from Hounslow Council and the Mayor of London's violence reduction unit to be the lead facilitator for the Hounslow parent-carer champion network to provide peer support to parents whose children are, or may be, at risk of serious youth violence, criminal exploitation and/or getting involved in the criminal justice system.

Meanwhile, the Government have been bystanders on the issue of crime and the causes of crime. On their watch, the number of arrests has halved, prosecutions have almost halved and the number of crimes solved has halved. More crimes are being reported, but fewer crimes are being solved. Criminals are getting away with it. Don't worry, the Home Secretary is working hard—but only to prepare her leadership bid. She is often missing in action and seems to talk about crime only when she thinks she can get a cheap hit and headline out of it.

I hope to finish on a slightly more positive note by saying that we have seen some signs of improvement locally in recent months. We have a new dedicated policing team in Hounslow town centre, made up of over 20 officers, focused on the high street which has been a hotspot for crime. Businesses and shoppers say that it has made a positive difference.

**Seema Malhotra:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the way our police and local authorities work with other organisations, such as No Shame in Running, run by Garvin Snell, and Project Turnover, working with children on the very edge of crime, is really important, and that our institutions must have the capacity to support those who do such frontline work in our communities?

**Ruth Cadbury:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Some of the most effective work is being done by people of, and from, the community—people like Garvin Snell and organisations such as AIM. They know the young people and they know the parents, but they cannot do it alone. They must work in partnership with statutory agencies. I am glad to say that in the borough of Hounslow there is better working together and less silo working between key public services. Only then, when we see the child as a whole and work around the child as a whole, can we support them in keeping away from crime and gang activity.

[Ruth Cadbury]

One other success, following my intervention, was the installation of CCTV cameras behind a local estate and extra police patrols after residents contacted me about crime gangs using the alleyway for a quick getaway.

To feel safe, all communities need a visible police presence, proactive community work and engagement with the local council. That is why my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) the shadow Home Secretary has called for the Government to bring back neighbourhood policing and to recruit over 10,000 neighbourhood officers and PCSOs. These are people who know their streets, know their community and know how to tackle crime. That is what we desperately need: a Government focused on tackling crime rather than chasing cheap headlines. After 13 long years of Conservative rule, people locally desperately want change.

10.23 pm

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) on securing the debate. It is particularly well timed, given that this week is Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week. In fact, the launch event happened in Parliament earlier this evening, attended by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines) who is the Minister with responsibility for safeguarding.

We are clearly all extremely concerned about the effect of antisocial behaviour: the effect it has on our communities and the way that it can undermine residents' feeling of safety in their own neighbourhoods. Whether it is a high street, a local park or a playground, people should be able to feel safe on their own streets and not feel any sense of fear or menace. The hon. Lady is right to say that antisocial behaviour should not be considered a low level or minor thing, because it affects how people feel in their own neighbourhoods. For that reason, it is a very important topic, and I am glad that we have an opportunity to discuss it this evening.

The hon. Lady started by saying that she did not want to talk about figures. However, although the stories are important and we will talk about how people feel, it is also important to have a firm statistical grasp of what is actually happening. As Members will know, the only statistically approved measure of crime in England and Wales is the crime survey, endorsed by the Office for National Statistics, which says that it is the only reliable long-term measure of crime. If we look at the figures since 2010, just to take an arbitrary year, we will see that violence has reduced by 41%, criminal damage by 68% and various forms of theft by about 40%. We have, therefore, seen dramatic reductions in crime, as reported by the crime survey, over the past 13 years, but we should not be complacent, and we clearly need to do a lot more.

One thing that we have in our armoury to fight antisocial behaviour is police officers. The hon. Lady spoke passionately and eloquently about that. It is particularly welcome that we now have a record number of police officers across England and Wales—149,572, to be precise, which is about 3,000 more than we had in March 2010. There are now more than 35,000 officers in London—every Member present is a London MP—which is more officers

than it has ever had at any time in its history. That is thanks to the police uplift programme that the Government funded.

**Andy Slaughter** *rose*—

**Chris Philp:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. London could have had another 1,000 officers on top of that, funded by the Government, but unfortunately Sadiq Khan was not able to organise himself to hire them, which is a great shame. I am sure that Labour Members, including the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), will join me in calling on Sadiq Khan to get his act together and recruit those extra funded officers.

**Andy Slaughter:** I just want to give the Minister a quick reality check. If he is right that crime is massively down, why are my constituents telling me every day that there is a feeling of lawlessness on the streets that they have not experienced before? Offences include drug offences and cars being broken into and stolen. If he has replaced the 20,000 officers that the Government initially got rid of, why, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth has said, do my neighbourhood teams have only one or two officers per ward, rather than the six officers that they had before the Conservatives started running them down?

**Chris Philp:** It is not me that is telling the hon. Gentleman that crime has reduced; it is the crime survey of England and Wales, endorsed by the Office for National Statistics. What he is talking about is the perception of crime, which is very important as well. It is important that people feel safe, and that is why we need to do more, but the figures are very clear. If he doubts them, I honestly recommend that he looks at the crime survey statistics, because they actually make for quite comforting reading. The perception of crime is important and there is more to do.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the deployment of neighbourhood officers. How the record number of officers are deployed is an operational matter for the commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, and the police and crime commissioner for London, Mayor Sadiq Khan. The hon. Gentleman's representations would be well directed to them, but London has never in its history had a greater total number of officers. I agree that having them on neighbourhood deployment is valuable. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth said that an extra 20 officers are part of a newly established town centre team. The same is true of Croydon, which also has about 20 extra officers, and that is very welcome and useful. In addition to officers, we also need bases from which they can patrol. I am sure that Labour Members will join me in calling on the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan to ditch his plan, announced in 2017, to close 37 police stations. I notice that, miraculously and for reasons that I cannot imagine, he has just decided to cancel the closure plan for Uxbridge police station. Let us hope that he cancels the closure plans for the other 36 police stations.

Let me move on to the importance of prevention. We have talked about police stations, officers and the importance of their being deployed in the neighbourhood, but prevention is important, too. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth referred to the Mayor of London's violence reduction partnership, and in the next breath



she said that the Government had been bystanders. What she forgot to mention was that the so-called Mayor of London's violence reduction partnership is entirely funded by the Government. For some reason, she omitted to mention that. I am glad to say that violence reduction units, or partnerships, have received £170 million of Government funding. They do valuable work in providing diversionary activity. The Youth Endowment Fund, which has £200 million over 10 years, identifies the best kinds of intervention and funds them, as well as cognitive behavioural therapy, which helps many young people.

We have an antisocial behaviour action plan, which was launched by the Prime Minister just a couple of months ago and is being rolled out as we speak. It has a number of elements; I will not detain the House by going through all of them at this late hour, but I will mention a couple. One is hotspot patrolling: antisocial behaviour hotspots are identified, and police officers are "surged" into those areas. Ten police force areas around the country are conducting pilots during the current financial year. I spoke to the police and crime commissioners about it today, and all the pilots will be up and running this month. From next April, every police force in the country—all 43 of the forces in England and Wales—will have hotspot policing, and there will be just over £1 million for each police force to fund the ASB patrols. That will be welcome, and will address some of the issues that the hon. Lady raised.

There will also be 10 immediate justice pilots, again funded with about £1 million for each force, and starting this month. People who take part in antisocial behaviour will very quickly—ideally within 48 hours—have to undertake restorative work such as removing graffiti or cleaning up a park or a high street, wearing branded hi-vis jackets. Once the pilots have been completed this year, every police force in the country, from next April, will have an immediate justice project, again fully funded by the Government with £1 million for each police force—about £43 million in total. We are banning nitrous oxide, which I think will also help on the antisocial behaviour front. I hope Members will agree that the antisocial behaviour action plan, of which those measures are just a small part, will help us to clamp down on ASB in our communities. The total funding for the plan is about £160 million.

In the moments remaining to us, let me commend the safer streets fund. The hon. Lady mentioned CCTV in an alleyway, which may well have ultimately been funded by the fund. London has so far received about £3.2 billion. The fund is designed to fund measures such as CCTV to help people feel safer on the streets, with particular

emphasis on women's safety but with the aim of combating ASB more widely as well. We will shortly announce the next safer streets funding round.

We take vehicle and bicycle theft very seriously—the incidence of both has fallen dramatically, and I think that bicycle theft may have fallen by as much as 65% since 2010—and we also take catalytic converter thefts very seriously. We had a spate of those in Croydon. I was told by our borough commander that a gang had been arrested a few months ago, and since then we have seen a big reduction, certainly in south London, although I am not sure whether the same is true in west London. We experienced a big drop about six months ago, when that gang was arrested. The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013—which began as a private Member's Bill, taken through the House by my constituency predecessor, Sir Richard Ottaway—has helped a great deal. The Bill was originally inspired by thefts of lead from church roofs, but it is also making it harder, although sadly not impossible, to sell the rare earth metals to be found in catalytic converters. We are working on that with the National Vehicle Crime Working Group.

**Ruth Cadbury:** I did ask whether there would be a review of the Scrap Metal Dealers Act. It is clearly not working, because we are still experiencing spates of catalytic converter theft.

**Chris Philp:** My predecessor's private Member's Bill, now the Scrap Metal Dealers Act, has dramatically reduced the theft of scrap metal from things like church roofs, which is what inspired his PMB 10 years ago, but we are always happy to look at whether the legislation can be strengthened. Broadly, the Act deals with metal, but I would be very happy to respond if the hon. Lady would like to write to me with specific proposals for how it could be improved or for how regulations could be strengthened.

It is welcome that crime has fallen so much since 2010 and that we have record numbers of police officers—more than we have ever had in England and Wales, and more than we have ever had in London, too—but we all accept that there is more to do to fight crime. This Government are committed to doing that, whether through the safer streets fund, violence reduction units or the ASB action plan. When we need to do something, we will do it. I look forward to working with Members across the House to keep our constituents safe.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.35 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Monday 3 July 2023

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

## Approved Mileage Allowance Payment Rate

4.30 pm

**Elliot Colburn** (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 600966, relating to the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment rate.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. The prayer of the petition reads:

“The HMRC mileage rate for reimbursing the use of private cars (e.g. for employees but also volunteers) has been fixed at 45p/mile (up to 10,000 miles) since 2011. The lack of any increase since then is a serious disincentive to volunteer drivers particularly as fuel has gone up again recently.

Since 2011, inflation has gone up by over 25%; fuel has increased by over 20% over the last 5 years. Volunteer car drivers who did so much during Covid, and still do, to get people to healthcare settings, e.g. hospitals, vaccination centres, and to deliver shopping and prescriptions, are not being compensated fairly for the use of their cars. Consequently charities are struggling to recruit new volunteer drivers. These drivers help free up hospital beds and keep people independent and in their own homes.”

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for opening his speech so powerfully. Does he agree that the approved mileage allowance payment rate must increase because it has not increased since 2011, while motoring costs, including the cost of fuel and vehicle maintenance costs, have risen?

**Elliot Colburn:** The hon. Lady has basically nicked the crux of my speech, but I thank her for making my point so succinctly.

The petition received over 41,500 signatures, including 25 from Carshalton and Wallington. On behalf of all parliamentarians, I should declare that MPs’ mileage rates, claimed through the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, are also calculated at 45p per mile, in line with the approach taken by His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs. However, I hasten to add that we are not debating MPs’ rates today.

I thank all those who signed the petition and have taken an interest in the debate, including the many volunteer and community groups that have been in touch. I also thank the petition creator, Rev. Nick Ralph, as well as representatives of the Good Neighbours Network, the Community Transport Association, Unison and the Association of Taxation Technicians, for meeting me to discuss the subject of the debate. As always, a massive thanks must go to the Petitions Committee team, who have worked incredibly hard to organise the meetings I just mentioned and to provide briefings in advance of the debate.

When I agreed to lead the debate, I did so with a focus on the charitable activity mentioned in the petition’s prayer, remembering the enormous volunteering effort that I witnessed and was part of during the pandemic,

both locally and nationally. Our country has a proud history of volunteering. One route can even be traced back to the medieval age, when there was a strong link between religion and the aiding of the sick, needy and poor. Indeed, according to sources, over 500 voluntary hospitals were established in England in the 12th and 13th centuries alone. More recently, in this century, we London MPs think of the enormous army of volunteers who helped to spread joy and cheer throughout the Olympic park during the 2012 London Olympics and, as I have already noted, the hundreds of thousands of people who volunteered their time to help those in need during the covid pandemic. From taking part in befriending telephone calls to collecting and dropping off shopping or prescriptions, the effort was enormous. It made me incredibly proud of our country and, indeed, my own community.

Volunteering is an incredibly noble calling, endorsed by its long history of royal patronage. This year, the Royal Voluntary Service launched the Coronation Champion awards to recognise volunteers who have gone above and beyond for their charities, and volunteering was made an intrinsic part of Their Majesties’ coronation itself. Billed as a lasting legacy of that momentous occasion, the Big Help Out took place on the bank holiday Monday of the celebration, with hundreds of thousands of people taking part across the country.

The numbers speak for themselves. According to a survey in 2019-20, 64% of people had volunteered at least once in the past year, and just shy of 40% had volunteered in the past month. The following year, 62% of respondents stated that they had volunteered at least once in the past year, and the number reporting having volunteered in the past month rose to 41%.

That potted history of the relationship between our country, its people and volunteering featured so heavily in my introduction because it helps to set the scene for the petition and makes clear its importance. Many in our communities depend on volunteers, but it is important that those volunteers, whatever they may be doing, feel valued and appreciated. That is important not just for retaining volunteers but for recruiting new ones. Yet from the conversations that I have had with affected stakeholders, the current HMRC AMAP rate is proving to be a real sticking point for many charities in retaining their volunteers, particularly longer-serving ones.

**Claire Hanna** (Belfast South) (SDLP): The hon. Member is outlining powerfully the benefits of volunteering for the community, but he will also be aware of its benefits for individuals. Does he share my concern that, as the cost of motoring rises, we are excluding many people from the benefits of volunteering to both them and their community, and does he agree that all community transport networks should be consulted in any review of the mileage rate?

**Elliot Colburn:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady.

The mileage allowance payment rate currently allows volunteers to claim up to 45p a mile for the first 10,000 miles and 25p for each mile after that, yet the 45p rate has not been reviewed or increased since 2011. That affects not just charities but many employees of the variety of businesses that use the AMAP rate to regulate employees’ use of their private cars for business.



[*Elliot Colburn*]

In their initial response to the petition, the Government stated that the rate

“is intended to create administrative simplicity by using an average, which reflects vehicle running costs including fuel, depreciation, servicing, insurance, and Vehicle Excise Duty.”

Indeed, I spoke to many stakeholders who agreed that the rate was probably the best approach for reimbursing volunteers and employees. It is easy to use and free from bureaucracy, and it minimises the burden of extra paperwork or the potential for inaccurate or incorrect payment.

The issue for the petition creator is not necessarily the system itself but the rate of the allowance. The “RAC Cost of Motoring Index 2011” concluded that that year was not an easy one for motorists; drivers had to contend with record fuel prices and a sharp increase in the cost of car insurance. Much of that remains true today—it is just a lot more expensive. All the costs associated with vehicle use have increased, but the disparity between today and when the AMAP was last adjusted is demonstrated most simply by the cost of fuel. The current average cost of petrol nationwide is 144.86p a litre, and diesel is at 145.54p. In 2011, the last time the rates were changed, petrol averaged 133.65p and diesel 138.94p.

Those averages do not reflect sporadic fluctuations over that time. One argument that has been made is that fuel costs were brought down by the temporary 12-month cut to duty on petrol and diesel of 5p a litre announced in last year’s spring statement, and the Government noted that in their response. Many people I spoke to in the run-up to the debate argued not just for a review of the rate but for regular reviews, which could take into account fluctuations and would make the system much nimbler, given the continuing uncertainty with respect to the costs of running a vehicle in general and of fuel specifically. Charities and employees could therefore properly fund and support those who currently find that the AMAP only partially covers the costs of running a vehicle, without fear of being penalised through the tax system for paying a more fitting rate.

The AMAP is only one way suggested to employers and charities to reimburse drivers. Some may argue that they could choose to pay more to reflect the increased cost of running a vehicle, but if a higher allowance is paid, an income tax and national insurance charge is placed on the difference. That is precisely why the petition was set up—to try to scrap the charge for those wanting to pay an allowance that better reflects the reality of driving a vehicle in 2023.

Can the Minister tell us how much revenue is collected through overpayment of the AMAP rate and how that would be impacted if the rate were raised to, say, 60p as outlined in the petition? It could be argued that with a more rigorous, up-to-date support system with regular reviews, our businesses and charities would be able to ensure that those using their vehicles for work or for volunteering are valued, and they would find it easier to retain them. The Government have worked to stabilise fuel costs by cutting fuel duty in the light of the knock-on effects of the invasion of Ukraine, among other factors. I believe that that stabilising work should filter down to our volunteers and workers through a regularly reviewed and increased AMAP rate.

The arguments in favour of the petition’s aims seem incredibly plausible, especially since, as I have noted—I am sure we will hear this a lot during the debate—the rate has not been adjusted since 2011. I hardly need to list the ways in which our world, our lives and the cost of things have changed over the last 12 years. Instead, in drawing my remarks to a conclusion, I will again draw Members’ attention to the workers and volunteers who have strived to get this country moving and growing over the last decade.

**Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con):** It is a pleasure to listen to my hon. Friend, who is making incredibly important and sensible points. Does he share my hope that the Minister will listen very carefully to them? We have a very strong voluntary sector on the Isle of Wight. Mike Bulpitt, one of the lead volunteers on the Island and chief executive of a community action centre, contacted me because he is worried that a lot of our voluntary drivers will find it difficult to continue to volunteer due to the lack not only of an increase in the rate but of regular reviews. I say on his behalf that we thoroughly support what my hon. Friend is saying. Does he share my hope that the Minister is listening and feeling generous?

**Elliot Colburn:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that the rate affects businesses and employees too, but the core principle is that volunteers, in particular, should not be penalised for their noble service and for giving up their free time to help others. It is clear that the rate is affecting the recruitment of volunteers to use their private vehicles at a time when those volunteers are so needed.

**Janet Daby:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so gracious in giving way again. Volunteers must be appreciated, and ensuring that these allowances increase is one way to appreciate them, but does he agree that public sector workers—I was one in the past, and they did so much during the covid period and continue to do so—should also be given the allowances they are due, too?

**Elliot Colburn:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right, too; public sector workers, particularly those working in our national health service, are also impacted by the reduced rate. That only enhances the petitioners’ call for the rate to be increased and reviewed more regularly.

Our volunteers in particular, but also our public sector workers, have shown themselves to be true engines of growth and betterment. It is surely time that they feel properly supported in their endeavours, whether entrepreneurial or charitable. If we are to ensure a brighter future for our country, those who drive it must be paid a rate that reflects today’s world and not the world of more than a decade ago. I look forward to hearing from all hon. Members. I hope that the Government will listen to our calls and look to introduce an increased rate, as well as a system of more regular review so that we do not have to come back to the issue every 10 years or so and just hope that the Government fancy doing it one day.

4.44 pm

**Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington

(Elliot Colburn) not only for the eloquence with which he presented his argument, but for its very balanced nature. This issue unites the Chamber; there is almost a manifest injustice here. There is little that has not increased since 2011, and there has been a significant number of elections, never mind of changes in office. As he correctly pointed out, it is not simply the voluntary sector that is affected. Not only those employed by the council, but those who are self-employed—the traditional white-van man and those in other occupations—also need recompense for the mileage that they are required to do to carry out their trade, their services or whatever.

In a matter that I have been pursuing locally it has often been put forward that there can be local settlements, but, as the hon. Member correctly pointed out, the template tends to be HMRC's and there are implications for taxation if that is not followed. Even when I have had negotiations and discussions with officials, it has been very difficult to get political sign-off, so it is one thing for officials to be persuaded. There are Members here who were at the meeting held by Unison along with the RAC Foundation. Although some might view Unison as having a vested interest, I do not think that that can be said about the RAC Foundation.

**Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con): I, too, was at the Unison-organised meeting and I can say only positive things about its engagement with Members right across the House. Let me put on the record my thanks to Anna Birley from Unison for the report that she so ably prepared.

**Kenny MacAskill**: Absolutely. I am sitting with a copy of the report myself and the hon. Member is correct; there were people from a variety of parties at the meeting. The RAC Foundation was not there in a political capacity. I think Unison did the right thing to hold the meeting with the RAC Foundation. It gave the meeting ballast and legitimacy because the RAC, along with the AA, is a specialist in motoring matters and has come to the conclusion that 63p, together with some form of system, is what is necessary.

Locally, I face all the difficulties that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington ably pointed out. East Lothian is not the biggest constituency—it is not the size of some of those in the highlands of Scotland—but it is still significant. It runs along the A1 for in excess of 60 miles, from Musselburgh all the way to the villages before the Scottish Borders. Although the principal town tends to be Haddington, with the community hospital hub and the council based there, people are unable to work without going into the other towns, which are equally jealous of their independence and seek to retain their own facilities, whether it is those on the coast such as Dunbar, where I live, and North Berwick, or inland at Tranent or elsewhere, never mind the small villages. Whether someone is doing voluntary work, working for the council or carrying out a trade, they cannot do their job without running up significant mileage.

We are not only talking about those working in fields such as care. There are people in senior positions and health visitors who are struggling financially because, as with others, they have seen their mortgage go up while they have to keep a roof above their head, yet it costs them to work because they are not recompensed for the daily mileage that they rack up. They need a car

to carry out their work on behalf of their employer, and they have to pay additional costs to do that. That is why the issue has to be taken on board.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington correctly pointed out that we should not just seek to remedy the mileage allowance once and then have to look at it again; it could be worthwhile to make it index linked. As the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) will be aware from the meeting I mentioned, we also have to bear in mind that when the allowance is paid by employers, it is meant to recompense workers not simply for the cost of fuel—the £1.45 that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington mentioned resonates with what Asda is currently charging in Dunbar—but for the wear and tear on their cars and for insurance.

One of the most significant things that I learned from the RAC Foundation was that fuel costs had increased at the lowest rate; insurance, as I recall, had increased at the highest rate, but other things had increased too. Not only do people have to pay for their petrol or diesel, but they have to pay the car costs that are necessary for their work and that their employer expects them to pay, because otherwise they cannot do their job. That is certainly true in my area, but it is the same in others, whether they are urban or rural. That is why the mileage allowance should be increased.

There is, as I say, political buy-in from across the Chamber. There is a recognition, not just from trade unions but from motoring organisations, that the rate is long past its sell-by date. It is clear from what others have said that this is not simply about people struggling to do their work, but about getting people into the labour market—a statement is being made elsewhere in this building on that very subject. People must be recompensed for their work and not pay out of their own pocket to do their job.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making a brilliant and eloquent speech. Many of my Livingston constituents signed the petition, but one of my constituents, who is a housing officer, was struggling to get by on the mileage allowance before the cost of living crisis. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that if staff, whether they are NHS staff or other public sector staff, cannot get by on the mileage rate that is being offered, they will go elsewhere? We are already struggling to keep people in those vital roles.

**Kenny MacAskill**: Absolutely. The issue was first raised with me by the chief executive of East Lothian Council, because it is struggling to retain staff, and staff are necessary.

I will finish there, Mr Sharma. It seems that we have buy-in from across the Chamber and, I think, in the community, as shown by Unison and the RAC Foundation. This is about remedying a wrong: 2011 was a long time ago politically, never mind in terms of costs, and on that basis I hope that the Minister can come around not simply to addressing the rate, but to ensuring that we do not have this issue recurring and that we sort out some annualised system.

4.51 pm

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Sharma. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) for leading this e-petition debate. Petition

[*Peter Aldous*]

600966 calls for a review of the approved mileage allowance payment rate—the AMAP rate—which, as we have heard, has remained at the same level since 2012. The petitioners are supported in their campaign by the Community Transport Association and by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who has previously called for an urgent review to reflect the soaring cost of living increases.

When previous campaigns have been launched calling for a review of the AMAP rate, the Government have invariably responded by stating that the rate is not mandatory—that employers can set whatever level of mileage reimbursement they want. However, very few set a different rate, due to the tax liability implications for employers and volunteers. The rate is thus a standard to which the vast majority of businesses and charities adhere; it is regarded as best practice and avoids the complications of drivers having to pay income tax.

I acknowledge that the 5p per litre cut to petrol and diesel prices, announced in the 2022 spring statement and extended through to next year, has provided respite and support to drivers, but the current cost of living crisis has brought into clear focus the need for a review. If it is not carried out, I fear that there will be negative knock-on implications for services such as the NHS, social care and public transport, and that ultimately the Treasury will pick up the bill.

Many of my concerns revolve around community transport and the great work that is carried out in north-east Suffolk and south-east Norfolk by BACT, which provides community transport for people for whom other forms of public transport are not easily available. BACT has its own minibuses and wheelchair-accessible vehicles, but a significant proportion of its services are provided by its volunteer drivers using their own vehicles. The failure to review the AMAP rate is imperilling the crucial lifeline services provided by BACT and many other community transport providers.

I shall briefly set out what I believe is a compelling case for a review. First of all, it should be pointed out that the cost of motoring has increased significantly since 2011-12. The petition, as we have heard, highlights that inflation has increased overall prices by over 25% since 2011, and that of fuel by over 20% over the past five years. Since 2011, vehicle maintenance costs have risen by 38% and, as we have heard, the RAC Foundation's cost of transport index has increased by 41%.

The third sector—that is, the voluntary sector—plays a vital role in local communities. We would not have gotten through covid without volunteers, and we need them even more now to get through the cost of living crisis. Many of those working for charities and organisations like BACT use their own cars, and it is only right that they are fairly recompensed for doing so. Currently they are not, and that disincentivises volunteers to offer their services. Community transport operators like BACT increasingly report challenges with driver recruitment and retention.

In many areas, including Suffolk and Norfolk, community transport operators have become a vital part of the public transport system. They are, in effect, the Heineken of the system—they go where commercial operators and the local transport authority either cannot or will not go—and heavy reliance has been placed on

them to provide their services. Without their drivers, a system that I sense already operates on the brink would collapse altogether and many vulnerable people would be left isolated. Community transport operators like BACT provide a vital service to the NHS, driving people to hospital, GP surgeries, vaccination centres and dentists. The latter can be quite a trek, even assuming that an NHS dentist can be found. They also provide non-emergency transport to hospitals, and if they are not around to do that, that will be another cost that the NHS has to bear at a time when it can ill afford to do so.

A product of covid has been a dramatic increase in social isolation and loneliness. During the lockdowns, many vulnerable people were left marooned in their own homes, and it was almost always local volunteers who rallied round to ensure they were not alone and not forgotten. Post lockdown, many people have only tentatively come out of their homes, and for some their only lifeline to the outside world is provided by the volunteers who drive them for their weekly shop, without whom life would be very lonely.

It is important to acknowledge that the service provided by community transport operators like BACT is vital in rural areas, where for many people there is no alternative means of public transport. If the volunteer drivers throw in the towel because they are not being properly recompensed, another group of people will be left stranded, unable to access services that most of us take for granted.

Finally, I come to social care. The Government rightly recognise the importance and the need for an integrated and improved health and social care system that keeps people independent in their own homes. That will need a whole army of dedicated social care workers on the road, invariably in their own vehicles, to visit and support their clients. Unfortunately, they are not well paid, and the last thing they need is a mileage allowance that does not cover the cost of keeping an old vehicle roadworthy. Skimping and saving on the AMAP rate will result in recruitment becoming even more difficult in this vital sector.

The case for a fair, urgent and transparent review of the rate is compelling. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's reply, but I urge him to take the message back to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he should instigate the review straightaway, with a view to announcing the outcome in the spring Budget.

4.59 pm

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak with you in the Chair, Mr Sharma. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) for leading the debate and for an excellent speech. I am very happy to contribute to this important debate.

Although a relatively small number of my constituents—38—signed the petition, the issue of mileage allowance payments looms large in my constituency and has been raised a number of times in correspondence and conversations with my constituents in Stoke-on-Trent South. Stoke-on-Trent is a hub for logistical industries and delivery operations of various kinds, and a larger than average proportion of the workforce works in health and personal care services. As we have just heard, social care is particularly affected by this issue, because people often drive their own vehicles to go to



care for people in their homes. Stoke-on-Trent is a city that has no tube or tram network and a very limited local train network, and bus services have been in sorry decline for too long. I am glad to say that this Government have shown a real commitment to remedying that, but for those who have to travel beyond the usual commute for work, without a company car or other such vehicles, there is often no alternative to the use of private vehicles.

In 2011, it was recognised that the time had come for the main allowance to increase by 5p to 45p, because it had been held at 40p for nearly 10 years, since 2002. It has now been more than 10 years since that last uprating. At the very least, we need to look at the allowance again and undertake a review, as many colleagues have called for today. Of course, I accept that the last 10 years were somewhat different from the 10 years before them. In the decade up to 2011, fuel duties rose from 45.82p per litre to 58.95p per litre, but drivers incur a number of other costs, as many colleagues have said. In the decade after 2011, the fuel duty story was very different, thanks to this Conservative Government. Duty was cut to 57.95p per litre in March 2011 and then frozen for a decade until a cut of 5p per litre on 23 March last year—a cut we thankfully still enjoy today. I welcome the Government's action. It benefits all motorists, and it is the simplest administrative measure available. Generally, I support the Lawson doctrine of lower tax rates funded by fewer tax breaks where possible, but there is clearly a need for a specific tax break, mileage allowance, to reflect the additional inflationary and other costs of using personal vehicles for work purposes. The system needs to be fit for purpose, and the rate needs to be appropriate to the current situation.

The Government say that they want to minimise administrative burdens, so the system needs to be simple and predictable. I wonder whether the employer's discretion in using the AMAP rate really makes the system that predictable for the driver. There is huge variation in how the rate is applied, and many use a rate that is far less generous than the standard rate. Unfortunately, I have heard of a number of employers that are not even applying the 45p rate, never mind a higher one, and some workers are having to suffer much lower rates.

Many who do larger amounts of mileage, such as those who work in delivery or a trade that requires them to travel around the country, have been hit by the 10,000 mile advisory annual limit, after which the rate drops from 45p to 25p. I have spoken with a number of constituents in Stoke-on-Trent South who undertake trades that require them to travel up and down the country to work and deliver services. They often travel many more than 10,000 miles in a year, and they have to put up with a much lower rate after they have gone over the 10,000-mile limit.

I note that the startups.co.uk website warns budding entrepreneurs and contractors:

"Whether you can claim, and how much, depends on an assortment of factors that can require a lot of admin to calculate."

Notwithstanding that, I think that most colleagues would agree that the current mileage system has not been as pressing an issue historically. The petitions and letters campaign has appeared quite recently, because the feeling that the allowance rate is insufficient is now acute, particularly because of the post-pandemic inflationary pressures, which have been massively increased by Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Even in the face of the freeze and cut in fuel duty, this issue continues to be a major challenge. To afford a more generous allowance, it has been suggested that the system be changed so that only certain sectors qualify for a higher rate. We have been talking about the social care and healthcare sectors, and a number of colleagues have mentioned the voluntary sector, wherein many people who voluntarily take parcels and things do so using their personal vehicles. It is potentially important to have a higher rate for individuals who are volunteering, and for organisations that are currently struggling to recruit volunteers because the rate remains at 45p, as it has for so long. The Government could certainly apply sectoral codes, as they do with other reliefs, such as the energy bill relief scheme, but deciding who is left out can lead to challenging outcomes, as I have found with the energy and trade intensive industries scheme, where some sectors have fallen through the cracks.

I do not underestimate how challenging the fiscal situation is. Over 10 years ago, the cost of increasing the allowance by just 5p was around £35 million per annum. That is quite a significant cost, but as the Treasury prepares for the autumn statement—now just weeks away—and the spring Budget, it needs to look at how the rates might be modernised to help with the cost of living pressures that many of our constituents are feeling, given that the rate has been frozen for so long. I hope that the Government and the Minister will consider the issue, and look into the potential for a review. I look forward to the Government's response in due course.

5.7 pm

**Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) on ably leading yet another Petitions Committee debate. Thirty-eight of my constituents in Darlington have signed the petition, but I know that it is an issue of great importance to many more. Mileage rates were first introduced to reflect the costs of using a vehicle for work and to make reimbursing them administratively straightforward. However, as we have heard, HMRC's current rates have not changed since 2011, despite many increases in the cost of motoring, particularly the rapid increase in fuel prices that began in early 2022 as a result of Putin's illegal war in Ukraine.

It is estimated that one in five frontline service workers are required to drive to do their job, often travelling significant distances to carry out their work. Moreover, research from the RAC Foundation shows that the vehicle of a public sector worker who drives for their job is typically older and driven further than the average. As that will result in a greater effect on the servicing and depreciation of their vehicle, it is clear that a significant number of those workers will be left out of pocket by the present mileage allowance payment rate.

I welcome that the mileage allowance of NHS workers under the agenda for change agreements are reviewed twice a year, taking into account changes in motoring costs, and I know that current NHS mileage approved payment rates were increased on 1 January 2023 to 59p per mile. That is above the HMRC approved amount. Although the approved mileage allowance payment rate is advisory, it is ultimately up to employers to choose what they reimburse. It is still hugely important to public sector

[Peter Gibson]

workers, charities and many others in society that mileage rates are reviewed across the board regularly, and not just for those working in certain sectors.

It would be remiss of me to not mention that, compared with others in the region, many of my constituents face another issue when it comes to the cost of motoring. Fuel prices at forecourts are significantly higher at Morrisons, Asda and Sainsbury's branches in Darlington than they are at the exact same supermarkets in Bishop Auckland, so I ask the Minister to look at what more can be done to ensure that my constituents get a fair deal. I appreciate that it is not the specific topic of this debate, but it highlights the postcode lottery of forecourt fuel competition in this country.

Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) was unable to attend today's debate. However, she has asked me to raise her concerns on her behalf. Her constituency is made up of 187 villages, with a number of elderly residents relying on incredible carers who get to them by car. We face a similar issue at Herriot hospice in Harrogate, of which I am a trustee. I know all too well about the impact of mileage rates on those who take part in rural community hospice care. An increase from 45p to 60p per mile would be of significant benefit to people such as carers, and I know that my hon. Friend also supports an increase in mileage rates.

I appreciate the efforts that the Government have taken to support motorists with increased costs. At the spring statement this year, the Government announced a temporary, 12-month cut to fuel duty of 5p per litre. Furthermore, to continue supporting motorists, they are extending the 5p fuel duty cut, which is worth £100 a year to the average driver. Ultimately, the Government have to balance support for individuals with the responsible management of public finances, which fund our essential public services, but it is clear to me, and should be clear to the Minister, that mileage rates need to be looked at very closely. I urge him to do all he can to ensure that we see this vital increase and that public sector workers who drive for work are not left out of pocket merely for doing their job. The Minister should be mindful that the HMRC mileage rate is used as a benchmark for many charities, voluntary groups and small businesses. Although it is up to such organisations to set their own rate, they take a lead from HMRC.

Public sector workers, charities, volunteers and small businesses need to see a change in the rates. I trust that the Minister can see that this has cross-party support, and reform would be welcomed by people in every constituency. Please, let us level up these mileage rates.

5.13 pm

**Ms Anum Qaisar** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I thank the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) for introducing the petition, and other hon. Members for their contributions.

Since the start of this cost of living crisis, many of my constituents have been in contact with me to express their concerns about the need to raise the approved mileage allowance payment rate to help tackle the impact of rising fuel prices and maintenance costs. As the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) mentioned, it is vital that we see reform and change.

As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) highlighted, the AMAP has not changed in over a decade. In fact, when it was last updated in 2011 the rate was set at 45p. The petition suggests that this amount be raised to 60p to help tackle rising fuel costs and the impact of inflation. Since the rate was last revised in 2011 costs have drastically increased, leaving much of the financial burden on drivers. It is more expensive to run a personal vehicle now in comparison to 2011. Although fuel prices have decreased from their all-time high of nearly £2 a litre in July 2022, with prices now hovering around £1.43 a litre, they are still 16% higher than the price when the rate was set in 2011. The costs associated with the maintenance and insurance of a vehicle are also much higher; they rose by as much as 40% between 2011 and January 2023. Those costs will continue to rise, leaving workers and volunteers worse off.

The failure to raise mileage rates is particularly detrimental to those in the voluntary sector, as we have heard from Members across the House today. I was recently contacted by Getting Better Together Shotts, which is an organisation that aims to improve the education, health and wellbeing of those living across Shotts and the local area. One of the vital services that it provides to the local community is transporting people—predominantly older people—to NHS appointments.

Volunteers can cover thousands of miles in their vehicles, transporting people to get the treatment they require. They provide a vital service in support of the NHS and local authorities. The covid-19 pandemic highlighted how integral they are to our society. It is only correct that those who volunteer are fairly compensated for the use of their cars, and I echo the calls of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and Volunteer Scotland that the rates should be raised to give better compensation to those who give back to society.

My friend, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill), said that his constituency is not geographically the largest. My constituency of Airdrie and Shotts is the same; it is not particularly large when compared to the constituencies of some of my Scottish colleagues, but it still encompasses some rural areas. It is obvious that those who live in rural areas are more dependent on vehicles to undertake their work. Some constituents have said to me that they have a sense that they are subsidising their employer through using their cars. Those in typically low-wage professions often travel the most for work. Some professionals, such as care professionals, drive many thousands of miles each year as part of their employment. Failing to adequately compensate those professionals leaves many of them out of pocket, especially during a cost of living crisis.

The problem is particularly acute for highland communities. As my colleagues from those constituencies can attest, people there often have to drive many tens of thousands of miles per year. That means that those working in some of our most rural constituencies in Scotland are racking up larger mileage and being left out of pocket.

The hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) made a crucial point when he drew on the impact of the cost of living crisis. I would gently go one step further, and argue that the impact of failing to raise mileage rates speaks to a larger issue of the mismanagement of the economy by this Government. There is a failure to recognise the impact of their actions on constituents

across the four nations. Volatility in fuel prices now seems to be a regular feature of our lives. The announcement today that fuel prices are 6p per litre higher than they should be due to weaker competition between supermarkets is only the latest example of that. The lack of action from the UK Government has allowed supermarkets to artificially increase prices, and that expense rise completely offsets the 5p fuel allowance introduced last year.

Workers and volunteers are relying on mileage rates. They are faced with not only the impact of volatile fuel prices but the Government's inability to get a handle on inflation, with the UK having the worst rate in the G7. Despite the Prime Minister's promise to halve inflation, the UK looks set to miss its target. Alongside that, household disposable income continues to fall. This year, it is estimated to decrease by 3.2%, which is on top of a 3.1% fall in the prior year.

By failing to raise mileage rates at the last Budget, the UK Government left employees and volunteers financially worse off. I hope that the Minister will lay out what steps the UK Government are taking to raise mileage rates and address the concerns of those who have signed the petition. We clearly have buy-in from across the Chamber, so let's get this done.

5.20 pm

**Abena Oppong-Asare** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Sharma. I thank everybody who has spoken in today's debate; I found all their insights informative, and they spoke passionately on behalf of individuals and their constituencies about subjects that are important to millions of people up and down the country. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) for his contribution, which provided an overview of the issue.

The petition we are here to discuss was signed by over 40,000 members of the public. It asks the Government to increase the HMRC mileage rate from 45p a mile to 60p a mile. Approved mileage allowance payments are used by employers to reimburse employees' expenses for business mileage in their private vehicles. The Government set the rate. The AMAP rate aims to reflect running costs, including fuel, servicing and depreciation. Ministers have previously stated:

"Depreciation is estimated to constitute the most significant proportion of the AMAPs."

The HMRC mileage rate is essential for millions across the country. For those working hard for their families, businesses and communities, it is a vital measure to ensure that they are not out of pocket for the extra miles that they do in their private vehicles. That has been reflected in Members' contributions today.

As a country, we are proud of our volunteers, who spend their spare time helping others and saving lives. The mileage rate is a critical support system that provides not only reimbursement for those actions but an incentive for volunteers to do more where and when they can, no matter their financial status. As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington highlighted, and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) echoed, it is important to feel valued. However, we are all aware of the cost of living crisis that British people are facing, which comes after 13 years of Tory Government. It is clear that families are struggling through no fault of their own, but as a result of the policies of this

Government. In the last year, Britain has been rocked by the worst cost of living crisis in a generation. It has been driven particularly by spiralling energy bills, which have fuelled inflation, thrown 3 million people in England into fuel poverty and forced businesses to close.

This country needs a Government who can get a grip and show some leadership. We need a Government who focus on the things that really matter and provide hope and optimism about the future. The reality is that the mileage rates have not changed in over a decade—to be exact, the approved mileage rate for cars, which is set by the Treasury, has not changed since 2011-12. It stands at 45p for the first 10,000 miles and 25p for every additional mile in a tax year. As Members have already mentioned, the cost of petrol and oil rose by 45% last year. In addition, overall motoring costs, including petrol, oil and vehicle maintenance, have soared since 2011. Fuel prices have settled somewhat since last year, but this country is still burdened by a high rate of inflation—8.7%. That is higher than in European nations and America, and proves that the Government have left our economy exposed. With higher interest rates, we are now facing a Tory mortgage bombshell for millions of people across the country. The Government are failing across the spectrum. Labour wants to make the changes that will help to fix that. I am talking about energy security, creating good jobs across the country, and making, doing and selling more in Britain.

With the increases in motoring costs and the overall cost of living crisis, it is reasonable to ask the Minister what impact the current mileage rate is having on the living standards of those affected. I also want to share a survey that was conducted by Unison last year and whose findings have been echoed by a number of hon. Members. It highlights how staff in our NHS and the healthcare industry are deeply reliant on their own vehicles to do their jobs. As we all know, that means that if they are not reimbursed, our healthcare workers are out of pocket for the life-saving work they do day by day. Unison's findings are based on 550 staff. They show that the vast majority—91%—of those who drive a car at work use their own vehicle. More than two in five—44%—of them travel more than 4,000 miles a year for work, including some who clock up more than 10,000 miles. An overwhelming number—95%—of staff who drive for work are required to do so as part of their contract. More than a fifth—24%—say that they are unable to use public transport to do their jobs, either because none is available or because it does not run at suitable times, and about one in six—18%—say that they need to carry heavy or dangerous equipment when they drive for work.

We all know and have heard personal stories from those in our constituencies who are struggling to put food on the table, pay their bills and keep their children warm over weekends and over the winter. Workers and volunteers across the country work long and hard hours, and they deserve a Government who listen and make fair and practical decisions in response. I therefore urge the Government to get around the table and listen on the issues affecting millions of drivers across the country. I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm whether that is taking place or whether the Government will be carrying out that work in due course.

That brings up another important issue—transport infrastructure across our country. I know personally how tough it is for families and communities who



[*Abena Oppong-Asare*]

struggle without the necessary transport infrastructure to get to work. In my constituency, we have a large community in Thamesmead who have no station, which makes them one of the only communities in Greater London left off the public transport map. On a positive note, I was pleased to see Transport for London submit a proposal for a docklands light railway extension to Thamesmead. However, we know that this is not an isolated problem but one seen across the country, and that other places have seen a decline in the transportation system. I think that that is one reason why so many people have signed this petition: it shows that our local communities severely lack the real transport infrastructure that they need and deserve.

Labour has committed to giving our communities control over their own destiny by unlocking the pride, potential and purpose of our towns and cities and putting power directly in the hands of people, whether that is in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. We feel that the UK is the most centralised country in Europe and the most geographically unequal large country in the developed world. That is no coincidence. Too much power is hoarded in Westminster, and that is holding our country back. The Government need to listen to communities that rely on cars because there is no adequate public transportation, and explain the level of support they are providing.

I thank everyone who signed the petition. As other Members mentioned, those who did so do not want to earn more money or to be greedy; they just seek a fairer system for all.

I have some questions for the Minister about the issues that I have raised. First, does he expect there to be any change in the mileage rates in the near future? Can he confirm what thresholds he and the Treasury are looking at when deciding how to set the mileage rates? He has said that the economic outlook is one factor that they consider when assessing mileage rates. Given that things are really difficult for people at the moment, has the continuing failure to get bills down had an impact on the Government's decision on mileage rates this year?

I thank the Minister for responding to the debate, but I echo that what is needed is for him to get around the table with working families and those representing all those affected, and provide full answers to their questions and a full explanation on this critical issue. The Government are facing this issue and many more because of an inability to deal with their failure to manage our economy over the last 13 years. We need urgent action to address the significant issues that many people face. Labour has a serious plan to get the economy growing. I urge him to reassure worried constituents who may be watching the debate, having signed the petition, that the Government are listening and will take action on this issue.

5.31 pm

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Gareth Davies):** It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Sharma, and it is a great honour to serve under your chairmanship. This is an incredibly important subject, and I will do my best to address all the many points that have been made in some fantastic speeches. I congratulate my

hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) on introducing the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee, and thank everybody who signed the petition.

The Government, right up to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, are absolutely committed to supporting individuals and businesses with the rising cost of living. That includes motoring expenses. Let me respond to the various points by first setting out what AMAPs actually are, the rationale for their existence, and how they work. Then I will talk more broadly about how the Government are supporting people, because hon. Members have rightly asked about that on behalf of their constituents.

As we have heard in this very good debate, approved mileage allowance payments, or AMAPs, allow employees to receive tax-free reimbursement from their employer when using their own vehicle for business journeys. The rate for cars and vans is currently set at 45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles travelled annually and 25p thereafter. The AMAP and simplified expenses rates are designed as tax simplifications, as my hon. Friends have pointed out. They are intended to make it easier for employers, employees and small businesses to record their mileage and calculate how much tax relief is due.

Simplification is at the heart of this. It is a key objective of the overall tax system, and the Government want the tax system that we oversee to be simple and fair, and to support growth wherever possible. The AMAP and simplified expenses rates are a long-standing tax simplification measure that helps us to achieve that simplification objective. Rather than having to work out a business or employment proportion of all their individual motoring costs, the rates allow taxpayers to make a simple calculation based on their business mileage to work out how much tax relief is due. The rates form the basis of a single calculation that can take the place of multiple calculations that would otherwise be required, which would be administratively taxing.

Because the single rates are much simpler than an alternative calculation of actual expenses, there will always be a trade-off between accuracy and simplicity for motorists who use the rates. The rate may reflect the actual costs of motoring better for some than others—we completely accept that. In some cases, it may provide slightly more relief than the actual costs would; in others, it might provide slightly less. That will depend on factors such as fuel efficiency, the car's size, driving conditions and the level of associated costs such as insurance. Tax simplification is an ongoing priority for the Government and, frankly, AMAPs helps us achieve that.

Ultimately, however, as several colleagues have pointed out, the AMAP rate is not mandatory. Employee and employer expenses are a matter for individual employers and voluntary organisations to determine. It is up to employers to determine the remuneration and expenses for their employees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) rightly raised the issue of employees who receive less than the AMAP rate from their employer. Those people can claim mileage allowance relief on the difference, as HMRC provides. That reduces the tax that they can pay, and I urge my hon. Friend's constituents to look into that in more detail.

**Abena Oppong-Asare:** As the Minister mentioned, the allowance offers relief whereby individuals can claim money back. Do the Government have figures on how many people are using the relief? It would be helpful to know that.

**Gareth Davies:** That is a very reasonable question. I do not have the figures to hand, but am happy to provide them if we are able to. I also point out that employees paid expenses above the AMAP rate may be taxed on the difference, depending on their personal circumstances—if they earn in excess of the personal allowance, for example.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Carshalton and Wallington and for Waveney (Peter Aldous), as well as several others across the Chamber, have outlined, volunteers are an important part of our communities and perform incredibly important services for all of us. It is right that they be highlighted and recognised in the debate today. The Government recognise the outstanding contribution that all volunteers and the charities that employ them make to our communities, including my community of Grantham and Stamford.

I should reassure hon. Members that, unlike employees, volunteers can receive payments in excess of the AMAP rate and do not have to pay tax if they can provide evidence that they have not made a profit. If they provide the receipts and evidence of their travel, they do not have to pay tax above the AMAP rate, unlike employees. That provides volunteers and voluntary organisations with additional flexibility, given how important they are. And they are important to the Government—that is why, for example, at the spring Budget the Chancellor set out an additional £100 million support package for charities and community organisations in England. That will be targeted at voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations at most risk at this difficult time. We will be setting out more about the eligibility criteria in due course, and hon. Members may wish to monitor that carefully.

**Peter Aldous:** That was an interesting point, and I just need to digest what the Minister was saying. I think he was saying that volunteer drivers can claim extra tax relief provided that they can show that they are not making a profit. Does he have any figures showing how many are actually doing that? I suggest that the system is so complicated that very few take it up. It would be far simpler to increase the rate.

**Gareth Davies:** The point I would make is that volunteer organisations do not need to use AMAPs; all that is required are receipts and evidence of journeys. Volunteer organisations can set literally any rate as long as that evidence is shown. The AMAP is a simplified rate and applies to employees of private organisations and businesses, for example.

I want to address the review period and the regularity of reviews, because they were mentioned by a number of colleagues. They make a fair point, but I would point out that by its very nature AMAP is a tax relief, as is mileage allowance relief. It is convention that they are reviewed at fiscal events, in line with most taxes we have, but it is also important for the work that we do with the Office for Budget Responsibility, so that it can score during the Budget process. That is why the reliefs are

always reviewed. I assure hon. Members that there is a review at every fiscal event, and it is right that it is done at fiscal events and not in the middle of the fiscal events cycle.

A couple of Members mentioned self-employed individuals, so let me quickly address that issue. Self-employed individuals can choose to use simplified motoring expenses, which allows them to deduct a fixed rate per mile against their self-employed profits, and those rates mirror the AMAP rates. Self-employed individuals do not have to use the rates; they can instead choose to deduct capital allowances and actual costs. However, it is not possible to switch between the two options with the same car or van once a self-employed individual has chosen to use either the simplified mileage rate or the capital allowances and expenses. I hope that clarifies the position: they do have that choice.

Some hon. Members rightly talked about the cost of living situation in which we find ourselves. I want to directly address that now, because AMAPs are one part of our system to support employees across the country, but it is important to recognise the other measures that the Government are taking to support people at this very difficult time, and that is part of the review process when we look at AMAPs. I simply reiterate the point that many hon. Members have made today: in the spring Budget, the Chancellor announced continued support for both households and businesses by extending the temporary 5p fuel duty cut and cancelling the planned inflation rise for 2023-24. That represents a saving for all drivers across the country, amounting to £5 billion, which is about £100 per household.

In addition, at the spring Budget we went further by extending energy support, because we know that inflation has been a real problem for many households across the country. We kept the energy price guarantee at £2,500 for three months from April, saving households an additional £160 and bringing total Government support for energy bills to £1,500 for a typical household since October 2022.

Alongside that, we have gone even further and helped to support households by ending the premium paid by over 4 million households using prepayment meters across the United Kingdom. We have also introduced 30 hours of free childcare per week for working parents with children aged nine months to three years in England, alongside a substantial uplift in the hourly rate paid to providers and market reforms. That is in addition to the benefits uprating and support for vulnerable households across this country that we announced at the autumn statement, which included new cost of living payments for this year and next, helping more than 8 million UK households on eligible means-tested benefits, 8 million pensioner households and 6 million people across the country on disability benefits.

Taken together, we have provided £94 billion-worth of support to help households with higher bills, or an average of £3,300 per household, across 2022-23 and 2023-24. That is one of the largest packages of support in Europe, but as the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) pointed out, high inflation is the greatest immediate economic challenge that we face. That is why the Prime Minister has set it out as one of his top priorities, and it is why we in the Treasury have set out a clear plan to reduce inflation.

**Abena Oppong-Asare:** I thank the Minister for his generosity in giving way, and his time. Given that over 40,000 people signed the petition and many have raised the issue, will the Treasury look into it? Will the Minister indicate whether work is already being done behind the scenes? Has the Treasury been lobbied directly on changing the mileage scheme, because I know Unison and other stakeholders have done some work on the matter? I would be keen to know if any meetings or engagement have taken place.

**Gareth Davies:** That is a fair question. I assure the hon. Lady that an extensive review is taking place, which takes into account a range of factors, but a big part of it is engagement. We have engaged extensively with various industries and unions, and we will continue to do that around the fiscal event cycle, as I have said. All taxes remain under review.

I have magically received an answer to the hon. Lady's earlier question: between 1.8 million and 2.1 million people use their own vehicles for business travel, and 200,000 employees claim mileage allowance relief. That is 40% of all those entitled to it. I hope that answers her question.

I am coming to the end of my remarks, but I want to ensure that I address as many points raised as possible. My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney made points about the importance of NHS staff, and I want to put on record my thanks to all NHS workers who use their own cars. I entirely agree with the emphasis he put on the importance of those workers to our society. I stress that paying the AMAP rate is voluntary. It is up to the NHS as an employer to determine expense rates. Travel cost reimbursement is covered by NHS terms and conditions, jointly agreed between trade unions and the employer. As my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) pointed out, as of January 2023, the NHS increased its rate above the AMAP rate to 59p for cars up to 3,500 miles, in recognition of the fact that a number of NHS workers travel a shorter distance.

**Peter Gibson:** I am grateful for the clarification. Will the Minister clarify why it is right and fair for that scheme to apply in the NHS, but not outside it?

**Gareth Davies:** As I said, the scheme is voluntary. Any organisation can apply a higher rate than the AMAP rate, and the NHS has chosen to do that. If my hon. Friend believes that other organisations should offer a higher rate, that is something he should take up with them.

**Peter Gibson:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. Will he outline what tax consequences there would be if an organisation chose to take those higher rates?

**Gareth Davies:** If a rate is provided that is above the AMAP rate, national insurance and income tax would be applied to that difference, depending on the personal circumstances of the individual—for example, depending on the overall amount of income tax they pay, or whether they are over the personal allowance amount. Voluntary organisations, which my hon. Friend spoke about, can offer any rate they want, as I pointed out to my hon. Friends the Members for Waveney, and for

Carshalton and Wallington. So long as evidence is shown for the journeys, organisations do not have to use the AMAP rates. I hope that clarifies things.

In conclusion, it is ultimately for employers to determine the expenses paid in respect of motoring costs that employees incur with their private vehicles. The Government set AMAP and simplified expenses rates with the aim of creating administrative simplicity. Those rates will necessarily be more appropriate for some motorists than others. However, the Government have taken decisive steps to support households with the costs of living, which I have extensively set out. The Government will continue to keep AMAP and simplified expenses rates under review, as they do all taxes and allowances.

**Peter Aldous:** I have listened very carefully to my hon. Friend and I thank him for his response, but would he not agree that, over the past decade, there has been a societal change in the way that community transport has become a vital component of our public transport system, and in the way that health and social care is delivered? Health and care workers often go to people's homes now, rather than those people coming to hospitals. That in itself warrants a fundamental review of the system.

**Gareth Davies:** My hon. Friend was just in the nick of time, but he makes a valid point. I will answer that in two parts. On care providers, the rate paid is a matter for the employer. It is entirely up to them, in the light of changes to how care is provided, to offer a rate that they deem appropriate; as I say, the NHS has offered a higher rate for those travelling fewer than 3,500 miles.

My hon. Friend made a broader point about the importance of community organisations, and mentioned community transportation. Those organisations are a vital part of our communities, particularly in constituencies like mine, in rural parts of the country. That is why this Government have got behind voluntary and community organisations. As I say, we recently announced another £100 million of support to specifically target charities and community organisations. That support will remain, just as it has for many years.

I am grateful for all the contributions and interventions from my hon. Friends, and from colleagues from across the House. This is an important debate to have, and I am pleased to have addressed the issue on behalf of the Government.

5.51 pm

**Elliot Colburn:** I promise not to detain the House until 7 pm. I thank all hon. Members for attending today's debate and, again, the petitioners for bringing us here to discuss this important issue.

I just urge the Minister to take back to the Treasury, in advance of the autumn statement, the fact that a strong cross-party consensus has been demonstrated here, and that we would like an uprating of the AMAP. I think that we all agree, as do the petitioners I met, that the system is not the problem; the frequency with which it is uprated clearly is.

I take the Minister's point that the rate is voluntary, but there are two quick points that I would make on that. First, on employers, of course they look to HMRC to set the standard. Many of them use the system, and not many would be tempted to incur a tax liability for



233WH

*Approved Mileage Allowance  
Payment Rate*

3 JULY 2023

*Approved Mileage Allowance  
Payment Rate*

234WH

going over that amount. Secondly, on volunteers, again, while I appreciate that one could go further, the need to provide evidence seems an unnecessary administrative burden. It would be much simpler to increase the base rate that voluntary organisations could offer, because of course the general principle is that no one should be out of pocket for using their personal car for work or volunteering.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 600966, relating to the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment rate.

5.53 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

*Monday 3 July 2023*

## CABINET OFFICE

### Civil Service Code: Prima Facie Breach

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Jeremy Quin):** On 6 March 2023, I explained in reply to an urgent question from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) that the Cabinet Office was looking into the circumstances leading to the resignation of Ms Sue Gray, the former second permanent secretary for the Union and the constitution. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out further information in a written statement on 2 May and a commitment was made to update the House again in due course.

The civil service code sets out the four core values of the civil service:

Integrity—putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests;

Honesty—being truthful and open;

Objectivity—basing your advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence; and

Impartiality—acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving equally well Governments of different political persuasions. The political impartiality section states, “you must...act in a way which deserves and retains the confidence of Ministers”.

Section 4.4.9 of the civil service management code sets out that all members of the senior civil service are in the “politically restricted” category, which places further restrictions on their political activity.

In addition, the guidance on the declaration and management of interests for civil servants, which is enshrined in departmental HR policies, sets out that individuals must declare all relevant outside interests to their line manager as soon as they arise. The policy advises that individuals should err on the side of caution when considering what to declare,

“but the onus is on the individual to consider what might be relevant and declare it”.

The Prime Minister has now received and accepted the advice of the independent Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOPA) in relation to Sue Gray’s appointment, and the final conditions letter has been published on ACOPA’s website. The Government expect all parties to abide by the conditions set out in the letter.

ACOPA’s final conditions letter sets out a timeline with regard to the contact Ms Gray had with the Opposition. It records that Ms Gray first spoke to the Leader of the Opposition in late October. This was approximately four months before she resigned from the civil service. The letter from ACOPA also states that

“she had subsequent brief informal conversations...where she was updated on their developing plans”.

She did not inform Ministers or the civil service of these interactions at any point prior to her resignation.

It is right that we maintain the principle of confidentiality with respect to individual personnel matters. However, I am sure the House will agree with me that the facts in this case, when compared to the rules and guidance in place for civil servants, speak for themselves, and that there is a public interest in ensuring that the civil service code is adhered to.

Given the exceptional nature of this case and the previous commitment by Ministers to update the House, I can now confirm that the Cabinet Office process looking into the circumstances leading up to Ms Gray’s resignation has been concluded. As part of the process, Ms Gray was given the opportunity to make representations but chose not to do so. This process, led by the civil service, found that the civil service code was prima facie broken as a result of the undeclared contact between Ms Gray and the Leader of the Opposition.

The rules and guidance that govern the conduct of civil servants are clear and transparent. It is deeply unfortunate that events have transpired in this way. However, regardless of the details of this specific situation, I remain confident in the impartiality of our civil service and would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that it is the responsibility of everyone in this House to preserve and support this impartiality.

[HCWS900]

## TREASURY

### Reforming Anti-Money laundering and Counter-terrorism Financing Supervision

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Victoria Atkins):** My noble friend the Treasury Lords Minister, Baroness Penn, made the following written statement on 30 June:

On 30 June 2023, HM Treasury published a consultation regarding the reform of the UK’s anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) supervisory regime.

Consulting on and implementing reform of the AML/CTF supervisory system is a key commitment in the Economic Crime Plan 2023 to 2026. It is expected to complement a number of other actions aimed at strengthening the UK’s anti-money laundering regime, and ensuring that businesses most vulnerable to abuse for money laundering or terrorism financing have robust and proportionate controls in place, and are subject to effective supervision.

The Treasury’s 2022 Review of the UK’s AML/CTF regulatory and supervisory regime concluded that, while further improvements should be made to the current regime, structural change may be needed to address certain weaknesses. This consultation outlines in more detail four potential models for the future of supervision and seeks to gather evidence on which will best deliver the reform objectives.

The first model, OPBAS+, would provide increased powers to the Office for Professional Body Anti-Money Laundering Supervision (OPBAS). OPBAS was established in 2017 and has made significant progress against its aim of ensuring high and consistent supervisory standards among the 22 professional body supervisors (PBSs) which supervise the legal and accountancy sectors.



The second model would consolidate PBSs so that between two and six PBSs would retain responsibility for AML/CTF supervision.

The third model would see the creation of new public body. This could take over the AML/CTF supervision of the supervisory populations of PBSs, and potentially some additional sectors currently supervised by HMRC. Alternatively, it could be given responsibility for the AML/CTF supervision of all populations currently supervised by a PBS or by HMRC. This would create a system whereby either three or four public bodies carry out all AML/CTF supervision.

Finally, the fourth model would place the AML/CTF supervision of all sectors regulated under the Money Laundering Regulations under the remit of a single public body.

These four models represent a commitment to strengthen the UK's defences against economic crime, responding to calls to address weaknesses in the current system made by stakeholders such as the international AML/CTF standard-setter, the Financial Action Taskforce. The consultation also seeks views on whether there is a case to increase requirements on supervisors and their regulated populations to further support compliance with sanctions.

The consultation will be open for three months, closing on the 30 September 2023. After this, the Government will make a policy decision by the end of Q1 2024 on the model which best achieves the reform objectives. Strengthening the effectiveness of the UK's AML/CTF regime will also support wider public and private sector priorities set out in the Economic Crime Plan 202 to 2026, such as the reforms of Companies House legislated for through the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill. Taken together, these reforms will help to cut crime, protect our national security, and support the UK's legitimate economic growth and competitiveness.

The consultation is published on gov.uk:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-anti-money-laundering-and-counter-terrorism-financing-supervision>  
[HCWS905]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Nature Recovery

#### The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Trudy Harrison):

I am repeating the statement made last Friday by my noble Friend the Minister, Lord Benyon.

The Government are committed to delivering large scale, widespread nature recovery across England. We depend on nature for everything—from food, water, and resources to the places we go when we need to relax and recharge—but over the last century, the state of nature in our country has declined dramatically.

Our environmental improvement plan, published in January 2023, set out how we will continue to help nature to recover and thrive. We committed to doing more to restore the vital habitats that support a huge variety of species, which will help us deliver the ambitious biodiversity targets we have set under the Environment Act 2021.

Local nature recovery strategies will be key to our drive to restore nature. The 48 responsible authorities, announced today, will lead on the preparation of localised, tailored strategies to support and recover nature, using the best of local expertise in the community. These responsible authorities, supported by £14 million of Government funding, will now begin to engage across their areas to prepare the strategies, working closely

with landowners, farmers and land managers. Regulations and statutory guidance setting out the process responsible authorities must follow and what they should include in the strategies was published in March 2023. Delivery of the proposals set out in a local nature recovery strategy will not be directly required but will instead be encouraged by a combination of financial incentives, the support of local delivery partners and broad requirements on public bodies.

Alongside local nature recovery strategies, which will support long-term planning for nature, the first round of the species survival fund opens today with an initial £25 million available to projects that will help drive the action we need to halt the decline in species.

Taken hand in hand, the species survival fund and local nature recovery strategies provide opportunities, both in the shorter and longer term, for new and innovative projects to make a real difference, so that communities across England can contribute to nature recovery.

This Government are proud of their extensive record on nature and climate. These measures are the latest of many to protect the environment. In just the last six months, we have:

- Set legally binding targets to protect our environment, clean up our air and rivers and boost nature

- Announced our environmental improvement plan which sets out delivery plan for building a greener, more prosperous country

- Announced nearly £30 million to support developing countries in delivering the “30by30” land target

- Announced the £5 million for projects which showcase the incredible work under way to study and restore nature across our network of overseas territories

- DEFRA Ministers attended the G7 Meeting on climate, energy and the environment in Sapporo, Japan. The G7 leaders agreed a joint statement to tackle global nature loss

- Hosted a major multinational event at Lancaster House in London to drive forward action on the COP15

- Provided the £16 million of funding for local authorities to support plans to make new housing, industrial or commercial developments “nature friendly”

- Published the draft border target operating model setting out the UK Government's plan to strengthen our borders against biosecurity threats and illegal imports

- Launched a new climate change hub for the forestry sector

- Secured a landmark deal for nature at COP15 in Montreal to protect 30% of our land and ocean by 2030

- Provided England's national parks with an additional £4.4 million to support services such as visitor centres and park rangers

- Handed over the COP presidency at the COP27 summit in Egypt as we work to tackle climate change and reverse biodiversity loss

- Launched the new green finance strategy and the nature markets framework to develop the growth of green finance

- Announced £110 million of funding for communities allocated under the rural England prosperity fund.

- Announced a ban this week on the sale of peat-based products in the retail horticultural sector by 2024

- Re-opened grants to boost domestic tree production with £5 million available for free and seed suppliers

- Provided £500,000 to our delivery partners of The Queen's Green Canopy to fund the planting of trees in communities across the country

- Published the plant biosecurity strategy

Introduced new powers, including unlimited fines and prison sentences, as part of a crackdown on illegal tree felling in England

Launched the Great Britain invasive non-native species strategy

Opened this year's round of the tree health pilot—a three-year scheme which tests different ways of slowing the spread of tree pests and diseases as well as building the resilience of trees across England

Made £14 million available to allow both local authorities and community groups to access funds for new tree-planting projects

Local Nature Recovery Strategy Responsible Authority	Planned total LNRS funding for financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25
Buckinghamshire Council	£238,000
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority	£307,974
Central Bedfordshire Council	£238,000
Cheshire West and Chester Council	£314,299
Cornwall Council	£343,692
Derbyshire County Council	£375,342
Devon County Council	£388,000
Dorset Council	£257,647
Durham County Council	£238,000
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	£240,747
East Sussex County Council	£300,740
Essex County Council	£379,987
Gateshead Council	£238,000
Gloucestershire County Council	£271,350
Greater London Authority	£238,000
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	£255,535
Hampshire County Council	£388,000
Herefordshire Council	£238,000
Hertfordshire County Council	£240,793
Isle of White Council	£238,000
Kent County Council	£381,784
Lancashire County Council	£388,000
Leicestershire County Council	£337,741
Lincolnshire County Council	£388,000
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority	£238,000
Norfolk County Council	£333,020
North Northamptonshire Council	£238,000
North of Tyne Combined Authority	£285,498
North Yorkshire Council	£388,000
Nottinghamshire County Council	£285,268
Oxfordshire County Council	£238,000
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	£238,000
Shropshire Council	£320,921
Somerset Council	£310,000
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority	£241,265
Staffordshire County Council	£388,000
Suffolk County Council	£282,108
Surrey County Council	£254,844

Local Nature Recovery Strategy Responsible Authority	Planned total LNRS funding for financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25
Tees Valley Mayoral Combined Authority	£242,285
Warwickshire County Council	£238,000
West Midlands Combined Authority	£238,000
West Northamptonshire Council	£238,000
West of England Combined Authority	£243,909
West Sussex County Council	£255,464
West Yorkshire Combined Authority	£296,911
Westmorland and Furness Council	£388,000
Wiltshire Council	£277,813
Worcestershire County Council	£253,618
<b>Total</b>	<b>£13,938,555</b>

[HCWS906]

### Shark Fins Act: Royal Assent

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** I am repeating the statement made today by my noble friend the Minister, Lord Benyon.

On Thursday 29 June the Shark Fins Act received Royal Assent, banning the import and export of detached shark fins, including all products containing shark fins such as tinned shark fin soup. The Act extends to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

This Act goes further than existing protections by preventing the trade of detached shark fins and related products obtained using this method.

Many species of shark now face significant population pressures. Out of approximately 500 species of shark, 143 are listed as “under threat” under the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with different species ranging from “vulnerable” to “critically endangered”.

Demand for shark products and subsequent overfishing is a significant driver for these pressures. The Act will help protect sharks and reduce the unsustainable overfishing of sharks.

This Act is a significant step in demonstrating the UK's global leadership in shark conservation, in protecting our natural environment, and in continuing to deliver on our “Action Plan for Animal Welfare”.

The Government are proud of their extensive record on animal welfare. This Bill follows several others in protecting animal welfare, both at home and abroad. Some examples include:

The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021.

The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022.

The Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022.

The Ivory Act 2018, came into force in 2022 and extended to further species this year.

Measures to crack down on hare coursing in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.

Glue Traps (Offences) Act 2022.

[HCWS907]

## Bathing Water Designation and De-designation in England

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** Designated bathing waters are coastal or inland waters that are used by large numbers of bathers and have facilities to promote and support bathing as set out in the Bathing Water Regulations 2013.

This year, four new sites were designated and one de-designated, taking the total number to 424, the highest ever. 93% of bathing waters were classified as good or excellent last year, up from 76% in 2010.

Today, my Department is publishing updated guidance on how to apply for both bathing water designation and de-designation for this and future bathing seasons, making it easier for applicants to understand.

The main changes to the designation guidance are:

There must be at least 100 bathers a day at the site during the bathing season.

Applicants must carry out user surveys on two days during the bathing season to provide evidence of this.

There must be access to toilet facilities within a short distance up to 500 metres of the proposed bathing water site.

Clearer guidance on seeking local views on proposals to designate sites as bathing waters.

The introduction of an application form to make it easier for people to prepare their applications.

Local authorities and landowners should contact Natural England for advice on managing bathing waters in protected sites, including ensuring any necessary consents, assents or licences are obtained from Natural England as appropriate. Bathers should comply with any local byelaws.

For de-designations the changes are the same except toilet facilities are not a requirement and a site must be used by an average of fewer than 100 bathers a day during the bathing season.

Applications for bathing water designation and de-designation in 2024 must be submitted to Defra by 31 October this year. My officials will consider all applications against the revised guidance and will continue to run a public consultation on those selected as candidate sites.

[HCWS908]

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### NHS Long-term Workforce Plan

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay):** I refer hon. Members to the oral statement I will make in the House today, 3 July 2023, on the long-term workforce plan.

[HCWS909]

## LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

### Community Ownership Fund

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Dehenna Davison):** On Friday, I was delighted to announce the outcome of round 2 window 3 of the £150 million community ownership fund, which will see £12.91 million awarded to 52 projects across the United Kingdom. This additional funding takes our funding total to £36.83 million for 150 projects.

This investment will ensure that important parts of our social fabric, such as pubs, sports clubs, theatres and post office buildings can continue to play a central role in towns and villages across the UK.

The community ownership fund is helping to reduce geographical disparities across the United Kingdom. To this end, the funding provided in round 2 window 3 will see over £2 million awarded to projects in Scotland, £1.4 million to Wales and £1.4 million to Northern Ireland. This, so far, brings the total funding awarded across Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to over £11.3 million collectively, with each nation on track to receive its minimum allocation across the duration of the fund.

The funding provided in round 2 window 3 will also see £8 million awarded to projects in England. This brings the total funding awarded across English regions to over £25.5 million collectively.

The community ownership fund is already supporting 98 projects across the UK such as the Leigh spinners mill in Greater Manchester; the Queen's ballroom in Blaenau Gwent, Wales; St Columb's Hall in Derry City and Strabane, Northern Ireland; and the UK's most remote pub, The Old Forge, in the Scottish highlands. These projects are making a genuine difference to their communities.

With the additional investment awarded in this bidding window, I am delighted to be supporting many more small but mighty local assets across the United Kingdom, levelling up the places we love and cherish.

Interested groups can submit an expression of interest form to start their application process at any time. The fund will be running until March 2025, so there is plenty of opportunity for interested community groups to apply to take over invaluable community assets and to run them as businesses, by the community, for the community.

[HCWS901]

### Investment Zones: Scotland

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove):** Investment zones are a crucial part of levelling up, and are designed to deliver economic growth, more high skill jobs, investment, and future opportunities for local people—a key priority for the Prime Minister.

The UK and Scottish Government have jointly announced that there will be two investment zones in Scotland and that the Glasgow city region and north-east of Scotland region offer the most potential to host these. This is a significant milestone for the investment



zone programme, and for our wider ambition to level up the whole of the UK as set out in the levelling up White Paper.

This is the result of significant joint work between the UK and Scottish Governments to identify investment zone areas in Scotland, reflecting Scotland's specific geography and economic landscape. The speed at which we have been able to develop this work is testament to the strength of the partnership between the UK and Scottish Governments. The locations of the Glasgow city region and the north-east of Scotland have been selected based on several criteria, including their research strengths, an assessment of economic need and potential, and a consideration of geographic spread.

Subject to final approval, investment zones will benefit from an overall funding envelope of £80 million each over five years. They will help to level up Scotland and drive long-term innovation and economic growth in selected areas. These will be focused around research institutions such as universities and focus on driving growth in priority sectors including digital technology, the creative industries, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and the green sector.

Our ambition is for these investment zones to make the most of both reserved and devolved policies as is the case with green freeports. We will publish further information jointly with the Scottish Government in due course and will continue to work in partnership, including with regional partners, the private sector and communities across Scotland to ensure our programmes' overall objectives are achieved.

[HCWS902]

## SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

### Project Gigabit Progress Update: June 2023

**The Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure (Sir John Whittingdale):** On 30 June 2023 we published, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/project-gigabit-progress-update-june-2023> Building Digital UK's (BDUK) latest progress update on Project Gigabit, the Government's £5 billion mission to deliver lightning-fast, reliable broadband across the UK.

In this update, we report on the six latest contracts to be signed in Cambridgeshire, the New Forest, North Shropshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Hampshire with a total value of up to £425 million, covering up to 284,000 premises.

In total, we now have 30 live procurements and contracts in place, amounting to £1.4 billion of funding available to the market to extend gigabit-capable networks into hard-to-reach parts of the country.

We also provide an update on the development of our first cross-regional procurement, which has been designed as an alternative approach to reach premises in areas where there is insufficient market appetite to support a local or regional procurement.

The report also highlights our progress across the Union, with procurements planned to launch in the summer in Wales and in the autumn in Northern Ireland.

The public review for Scotland has concluded, and the Scottish Government have committed to launch procurements by the end of the year.

On top of our Project Gigabit procurements, more than 117,000 vouchers have been issued so far under the gigabit broadband voucher scheme and its previous iterations. To date, 89,000 of these vouchers have been used to connect premises to a gigabit-capable connection. Two case studies included in the report provide an overview of the benefits of the voucher scheme, highlighting examples of successful projects on the Isle of Jura and in Elvington, North Yorkshire.

Finally, we report on the launch of an £8 million fund to provide satellite connectivity to a cohort of 35,000 of the very hardest-to-reach premises. This announcement follows the launch of alpha trials in December 2022.

I will place a copy of the latest Project Gigabit progress update in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS903]

## TRANSPORT

### High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill: Second Additional Provision

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Huw Merriman):** On 9 March 2023, the Secretary of State for Transport restated the Government commitment to building HS2 between London Euston and Manchester. Continuing to progress the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill through Parliament is a vital part of this commitment. Today the Government are introducing into Parliament a second additional provision to the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill.

HS2 is a key part of the Government levelling-up agenda; this new railway will act as a catalyst for investment and economic growth, offering an unparalleled opportunity to deliver new homes, jobs and commercial development. The section of the railway between Crewe and Manchester will also form the foundations for Northern Powerhouse Rail, boosting inter-city connections and speeding up east-west rail services between the north's towns and cities.

The second additional provision proposes a number of changes to the powers of the Bill. These changes have been developed following engagement with individuals and businesses, requests from individuals affected by the route, and further improvements to the route design, to ensure that the best possible railway is built. The main changes are:

Realignment of the M56 junction 6;

Lane and slip road works at junctions 19 and 20a of the M6;

Relocation of the Palatine Road Vent Shaft to the former Hollies Convent School site near the Britannia Country House Hotel;

Altered utility works to avoid or mitigate impacts on five ancient woodlands and sites of special scientific interest;

Road works along the line of route between Crewe and Manchester Piccadilly station to reduce congestion and increase road capacity during construction and operation.

The additional provision also includes works to reduce the risk of flooding, new footpath provision, changes to parking and taxi provision at Manchester Piccadilly station, and added areas of planting to mitigate impacts on the environment.

Delivery of a project on the scale of HS2 will inevitably cause disruption for local people and their communities. Those individuals who are directly and specially affected by today's proposals can petition against the changes. The petitioning period will open tomorrow—4 July 2023—and continue until 15 August. I have overseen extensive engagement with affected individuals and their communities by HS2 Ltd and I have written to elected representatives, such as parish councils and local authority leaders, as well as my colleagues with impacted constituencies in Parliament. Petitions will be heard by the specially appointed Select Committee. The Select Committee can

make recommendations to address matters raised—it may amend the Bill, it may ask for new Bill powers, or it may require HS2 Ltd to address a petitioner's issues via other means.

I am also publishing a supplementary environmental statement setting out the significant effects, mitigation, and compensation from the changes in the additional provision, as well as reporting new environmental information relating to the scheme. A public consultation on these documents will run until 31 August 2023. The documents will be put in the Libraries of both Houses and will also be made available in locations open to the public in all local authorities and parishes affected by the changes.

[HCWS904]

# Ministerial Correction

*Monday 3 July 2023*

## JUSTICE

### **Employment Tribunals: Average Waiting Times**

*The following is an extract from Justice questions on 27 June 2023.*

### **Employment Tribunals: Average Waiting Times**

11. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in average waiting times for employment tribunals. [905642]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mike Freer):** Following a merger of IT systems, there is no current data on average waiting times, but the outstanding caseload has reduced from 48,000 in February

to 41,000 in March this year because of an increase in the number of sitting days. As well as the increased sitting day allocation, we continue to support and reform the employment tribunals process and to make progress in reducing the backlog.

*[Official Report, 27 June 2023, Vol. 735, c. 137.]*

*Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer):*

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore).

The correct response should have been:

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mike Freer):** Following a merger of IT systems, there is no current data on average waiting times, but the outstanding caseload has reduced from 48,000 in February to 41,000 in March this year, **in part** because of an increase in the number of sitting days. As well as the increased sitting day allocation, we continue to support and reform the employment tribunals process and to make progress in reducing the backlog.





# ORAL ANSWERS

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# MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

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**not later than  
Monday 10 July 2023**

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