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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 20 July 2023

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: Before we start today's business I would like to say that, as we are almost at the end of term, I hope all right hon. and hon. Members have a productive summer and enjoy the recess. I know how busy you will be in your constituencies, taking the opportunity to make visits that are difficult to schedule during sitting times, and continuing to pursue all manner of issues on behalf of your constituents, which is incredibly important work.

I know too that all right hon. and hon. Members will wish to join me once again in thanking all the staff of the House, the security staff, the digital service and the catering outlet staff for everything they do to support us. It is much appreciated by Members.

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Outdoor Swimming

2. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): Whether she plans to support the uptake of outdoor swimming. [906068]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): Outdoor swimming represents one of the many ways to stay active. Through the together fund, Sport England has provided over £80,000 for outdoor swimming projects. Swimming and water safety forms a mandatory part of the primary PE national curriculum.

Peter Aldous: The Beccles lido does great work in promoting outdoor swimming in the Waveney area, but it and other lidos have been particularly hard hit by high energy costs and long-term fixed-price contracts, often arranged by rogue energy brokers. The swimming pool fund is extremely welcome, but I urge my right hon. Friend to work with lidos to put in place a long-term plan for their future.

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the importance of swimming pools and lidos. We announced the swimming pool fund to help those that have been particularly struggling with high energy costs. Sport England also plays a vital role in working with local authorities on managing sustainable facilities, and we will shortly publish our new sports strategy, which will set continued commitments in this area.

Mr Speaker: Let us go to the wild swimmer of Strangford lough, Jim Shannon. [*Laughter.*]

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Wild swimming conjures up all sorts of things in my mind—probably more emphasis on the wild.

I thank the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) for the question and the Minister for his response. Growing up in Ballywalter in the '60s—also the age I am right now—there were no swimming pools, and we always used the sea. It is important that water has the quality and cleanliness to allow people to swim, so has the Minister spoken to any of the councils or authorities in Northern Ireland to ensure that our waters, including Strangford lough and the sea off Ballywalter, are of a standard that enables people to swim without any fear?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the quality of outdoor waters, and a lot of work is done to educate children in water safety. I have not had the chance to speak to anybody in Northern Ireland yet, but I understand that I may well be going there during the recess, so I will take the opportunity to do just that.

Charity Regulation

3. **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the regulation of charities. [906069]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): The Charity Commission performs an important and effective function as the independent registrar and regulator of charities in England and Wales. The commission's annual report and accounts for 2022-23 provide a detailed analysis of its performance and effectiveness. Charity law and regulation is of course devolved in both Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): My question is about Arts Council England, which is of course a registered charity. A senior employee there recently won a tribunal claim for harassment on account of her gender-critical beliefs. In the course of the hearing, it became evident that there was considerable homophobic bias among some staff at Arts Council England, who did not wish the Arts Council to give grants to projects initiated by LGB groups unless those groups accepted gender identity ideology. There was evidence that an LGB charity had been described by Arts Council employees as a "cancer" and "neo-Nazi". What is the Minister doing to tackle the climate of prejudice and bias that has been exposed at Arts Council England, a charity that dispenses over £950 million of public money per annum?

Stuart Andrew: I hope the hon. and learned Lady knows that I take all forms of discrimination extremely seriously, and there should be no place for that. She raises an individual case. The Arts Council does not come under my portfolio, but I will happily speak to my ministerial colleagues about that and ensure that we write to her with an answer.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): My question is about the regulation of charities, following on from the question asked by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). Does my right hon. Friend the Minister read *Private Eye*? If he does, he will have seen the saga of the Actors' Benevolent Fund, where it appears that the people who did right have been put out and the people who did wrong, over and over again, have been supported by the Charity Commission. Could he say to the Charity Commission that people in Parliament are watching this with some surprise?

Stuart Andrew: Of course the Charity Commission is an independent body, but I have regular meetings with it. I am not a regular reader of *Private Eye*, but I will make sure that I seek out that article ahead of my next meeting with the Charity Commission.

Arts and Culture: Brexit

4. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the potential effect of the UK's departure from the EU on the UK arts and culture sector. [906070]

The Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure (Sir John Whittingdale): The UK arts and culture sector has many strong existing positive relationships in Europe, and we are taking a number of steps to deepen ties. The Government have developed bilateral agreements with European countries, and the British Council offers further sector-specific support, including the recently announced spotlight on culture between the UK and France.

Martyn Day: The UK Trade and Business Commission found that the Scottish arts and film industry has lost €27 million in EU funding as a consequence of Brexit, so will the Minister's Government make up for that shortfall and the calamity that Brexit has imposed on the sector?

Sir John Whittingdale: While the UK decided not to participate in Creative Europe, nevertheless the UK shared prosperity fund, which is a UK-wide funding initiative, has match funded what was originally available from the EU and also gives local authorities, and indeed nations, control over how that money is spent.

BBC Board: Complaints Procedure

5. **Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Whether she has had discussions with the BBC board on its complaints procedures. [906071]

The Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure (Sir John Whittingdale): The Secretary of State and I meet with the BBC's leadership regularly to discuss a range of issues. The BBC's processes for handling audience complaints about its editorial content are an area of focus of the mid-term review and, as required by the terms of reference, the DCMS has been consulting the BBC on the review's findings. We are seeking to conclude the review at pace and to report on its findings by 2024.

Ian Paisley: I look forward to the conclusions of the review. The Minister will know my views: the complaints process within the BBC is utterly inadequate, and I think

he agrees with me on that. There is no genuine independence in that process and therefore there is a lack of confidence in how that process is working. I hope he will factor those views into making sure that the outcome of the review takes on board the need to have a genuinely independent complaints mechanism, so that the public can have confidence in the broadcasts.

Sir John Whittingdale: We are aware that research from Ofcom bears out what the hon. Gentleman has said, in that there is considerable dissatisfaction with the existing complaints procedure. That is something about which the BBC is also aware, and we are keen to address it in the mid-term review. So far, we are making good progress in reaching agreement with the BBC on how it can be strengthened in the future.

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

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Over the last 10 days, we have seen the BBC embroiled in a lengthy bout of self-analysis over accusations made about Huw Edwards. For days, the story led every bulletin and I refused all requests for comment; I felt I did not know enough detail. I am glad I took that stance. The BBC has announced an investigation, but the police have now said there was no criminality, as originally claimed by *The Sun*. What does the Secretary of State think the lessons might be? Perhaps politicians should exercise more caution before issuing condemnations about developing stories; maybe we should remember to treat any story in *The Sun* with extreme caution. Given this further example of intrusive prurience, we could all remind ourselves of why there was once widespread agreement about having an independent press regulator with teeth, something the Conservatives once supported, before getting frightened off by powerful press barons.

Sir John Whittingdale: I say to the hon. Gentleman that, first, this was a matter for the BBC. Although the Secretary of State and I did ask to be kept informed by the BBC, it was a matter for the organisation itself and, as he has suggested, it has established an internal inquiry to find out whether there are any lessons to be learned. With regard to *The Sun*, it is of course a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation, which has a code, and if there have been breaches of the code, then that is a matter for IPSO to adjudicate on.

BBC Local Radio Services

6. **Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the BBC board on changes to local radio services. [906072]

The Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure (Sir John Whittingdale): We recognise the strength of feeling about the importance of BBC local services and we remain disappointed that the BBC is planning to reduce parts of its local radio output. This is a matter for the BBC, but Ministers have raised our concerns about the BBC's plans previously, and we will discuss this issue with the interim chair and the director general at the next opportunity.

Dame Diana Johnson: I think that we all thought that digital technology was meant to expand choice. However, in recent times, we have seen post office, bank and rail ticket office closures, and the BBC is using the same arguments to justify the managed decline of local radio. I saw today that we have been told by the BBC that it wants to reach 50% of the population with its TV, radio and online services after its digital plan is carried out. But I have seen in the annual report that it says that it is already at 50%, so why is it using that as a justification for the vandalism of local radio?

Sir John Whittingdale: The BBC obviously needs to take account of the fact that more and more people are accessing content online and digitally, and therefore it has decided to invest more in that area. However, it is one that is already well provided for, particularly in the area of local news. It is important that the BBC does not lose sight of the fact that there are still a significant number of people who rely on traditional broadcasting and value local radio. As I have made clear, the Government are disappointed by the BBC's decision to reduce local radio output.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): As you know, Mr Speaker, local radio is such a lifeline to many of the elderly, vulnerable and isolated people in our communities. I wonder whether the Minister has a view on what the words "public service" in the BBC's public service remit actually mean. Should that not include reaching everyone with local news and information, not just those who are digitally enabled?

Sir John Whittingdale: As I said earlier, many people still value local radio and will regret and, indeed, be very concerned about the reduction in local radio output that the BBC has proposed, particularly in the evenings and at weekends. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will take advantage of the opportunity that she has through chairing the extremely important Committee overseeing the BBC to raise that matter with the director-general again, as indeed will we.

Mr Speaker: I would say that the BBC is very good at showing empty chairs, but there will now be empty studios if we are not careful, and we certainly do not want to see the end of Radio Lancashire.

Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket Report

7. **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab):** What assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the report of the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket entitled "Holding Up a Mirror To Cricket" published in June 2023. [906073]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): Discrimination has no place in sport or wider society. The ICEC report makes for difficult reading. Clearly, the sport needs to reflect carefully on the report's concerning findings and consider how best to deliver clear and sustained cultural change across cricket. The Government will review the findings of the report, and we welcome the England

and Wales Cricket Board's commitment to bring forward a plan to tackle these serious issues, which must be addressed in full.

Mr Dhesi: After the exposés of whistleblowers such as Azeem Rafiq, the "Holding Up a Mirror to Cricket" report lays bare the extent of racism, sexism and classism in cricket. Over the past couple of years, we have seen scandals in cricket, abuse in gymnastics, a whole plethora of issues unearthed by the fan-led review into football and the sport of rugby union undertaking a review into its governance, and I fear that, sadly, there will be further such examples. Just how confident is the Minister that structures are in place to deal with inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour in sport, and does he now feel that there is a need to look into governance in sport more widely?

Stuart Andrew: I have made that issue a priority in the time that I have been in this role, because it does need addressing. I hold regular meetings with the national governing bodies of all the sports and I have laid down challenges to them. We need to work together, though. That is why this will form an important part of the new sports strategy. I know that it has taken some time, but I have been really clear that I want that issue to be included in it, and to be a central plank of the work that we do when we publish it.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): In my constituency we have fantastic grassroots cricket clubs promoting inclusivity in the sport during their cricket weeks. That includes clubs such as Sidcup and national club champions Bexley cricket club. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the clubs for the work that they do to promote cricket in our community, especially to women and girls, and Bexley cricket club for its efforts to raise funds to address cardiac risk in the young?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is right to highlight that not everything is bad. Let us recognise some of the amazing work, particularly of volunteers, who do so much for grassroots sport. He highlights a club in his constituency. It is not just about encouraging more people to take part in sport; clubs also do tremendous work in the community, as he has just highlighted with the fundraising that that club has done.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I wish you a restful recess, Mr Speaker. I put on the record my hopes that the Lionesses do very well in the forthcoming World cup. Congratulations to the women's English cricket team on a strong performance, and good luck to the men's cricket team in trying to pull off a great Ashes comeback. I just hope that the Manchester rain holds off.

Despite the teams' successes on the international stage, the ICEC report showed that there is a lot to do to increase diversity and participation in cricket. It found that English cricket suffers from sexism, elitism and racism. Do the Government understand that they also have a role to play in addressing those serious findings? For example, what discussions has the Minister had with the Department for Education about increasing

the take-up of cricket in state schools and ensuring better access to pitches, equipment and coaching? Also, does he agree—I am sure he does—that it is about time that the women's team had as much access to Lord's cricket ground as Eton and Harrow?

Stuart Andrew: I join the hon. Lady in wishing the men and women's England cricket teams all the very best, and thanking them for what they have done so far, as well as the Lionesses. I am very fortunate that I will be off to Australia on Monday to wave the flag in support of them. *[Interruption.]* It is a very difficult job, but someone has to do it.

On the serious point that the hon. Lady raises, she is absolutely right. On the day of the publication of the report, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met with the England and Wales Cricket Board. We have said that we will be following the development of its plan very carefully. The hon. Lady is right that we need to see more access to facilities for women and girls, not just at Lord's but right across the country.

Charity Sector: Cost of Living

8. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the effect of increases in the cost of living on the charity sector. [906075]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): The Government understand that cost of living pressures are impacting many in the charity sector, which is facing increased demand, reduced income and high running costs. That is why the Government announced a funding package of just over £100 million for community organisations in England.

Gavin Newlands: As the SNP spokesperson, I am more than happy to swallow my principles and join the Minister on that flight to Australia on Monday.

According to the Charities Aid Foundation, more than a third of charities have had to make cuts to their services due to the harm that the Tory cost of living crisis has wrought on their finances. Three in five Scottish charities are worried about struggling to survive. Only this Government have the financial powers to intervene, yet they refuse to do so. Are the Government content to let charities, which all too often ameliorate the failures of the state, fail too?

Stuart Andrew: I simply do not recognise that situation. I have just announced that we have given £100 million, and some of it was Barnetted. I have not heard anything from the Scottish Government about what they are going to do for Scottish charities. Maybe they should follow our example.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The plight of so many charities would be significantly improved if the Secretary of State were to raise the cap on postcode lottery sales, would it not?

Stuart Andrew: I know that my hon. Friend has been campaigning hard on this issue, and we had a Westminster Hall debate on it very recently. I have committed to

looking at some of the structures, but we need to see more evidence that the limits already there are not being reached at the moment. I will certainly keep the matter under review.

Creative Industries: Skills and Training

9. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What steps she is taking to support skills and training in the creative industries. [906076]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer): The creative industries sector vision sets out how we will support individuals to get the skills they need to work in the industry. From schools to T-levels, and from apprenticeships to returners, our ambition is to support 1 million more jobs in the creative industries by 2030. Yesterday I co-chaired a roundtable with the Education Secretary to improve flexi-job apprenticeships in the sector. Last week the cultural education plan's expert advisory panel met for the first time, and procurement for creative skills bootcamps are now live.

Stephen Metcalfe: I commend my right hon. Friend on the recent creative industries sector vision, which will help to build a pipeline of talent that will underpin the creative industries. Does she agree that it is vital that we invest in building the skills throughout the country, recognising that many of the growth sectors within the industry are outside London?

Lucy Frazer: That is right. We know that creative businesses flourish in geographic clusters, from games in Leamington Spa to fashion in Leeds, and we have already announced that we will invest a further £50 million in at least six new clusters, creating new centres of excellence that will act as magnets for inward investment and talent.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Last night was the summer reception of UK Music, and I was there as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on music, along with the shadow Secretary of State and the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. If Ministers had been able to come, they would have heard an appeal for more education in the creative sectors in our schools and for more support for our grassroots venues, which are the research and development of the creative industries, particularly the music industry, and which are suffering from a crisis at the moment. What more are the Government going to do to support education at that level so that skills and training in our creative industries can enable them to keep flourishing into the future?

Lucy Frazer: I hope the hon. Gentleman read the sector vision, which included £5 million in additional funding for grassroots music venues—something we discussed at the Select Committee. We, too, think it is important to have those creative subjects in school; that is why art, design and music are already in the national curriculum and remain compulsory in all maintained schools up to the age of 14. But that is not all we are doing. He mentioned music, which is incredibly important. That is why we have our new joint national plan for music education, including £25 million of funding for musical instruments and equipment for schools, and, as

I mentioned, we had our first meeting of the cultural education panel, which is looking at how we can ensure we help young people to get more creativity both in and outside school to ensure we have that creative excellence.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): The creative industries are a powerhouse of the UK economy, succeeding despite the Government's best efforts to attack the institutions that underpin them. With the growth of the creative industries, there are now a huge number of job vacancies, yet it remains one of the least diverse sectors in the economy, dominated by white, middle-class people—even more so than banking, law and media. Under this Government, we have seen a huge drop in creative subjects being taken at GCSE. Will the Secretary of State support Labour's new policy to increase music, drama and the arts in schools and transform our curriculum to meet the needs of the future economy, which desperately needs creative skills, rather than one that is stuck in the past?

Lucy Frazer: The shadow Secretary of State will know that the Prime Minister has identified the creative industries as one of the five sectors of growth that we are supporting as a Government, because they are really important. She mentions GCSEs, but I do not think we should just have music and arts at GCSE. We need them at T-levels, we need apprenticeships and we need them in primary school. She will know, because I have talked about it incessantly, that that is exactly what we are doing and that is what is in our creative sector vision. I will just point out—because I was reminded of it the other day—that a Labour Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, slimmed down the statutory curriculum for creative education and told headteachers to teach fewer creative subjects at school.

Sports Strategy

10. **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): What progress her Department has made on publishing a sports strategy. [R] [906078]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): The Government have committed to delivering a refreshed sports strategy that will set the long-term strategic policy direction for sport. The strategy will outline the Government's future ambitions and how we will support the sector to achieve them, and we intend to publish it as soon as possible.

Dr Evans: I am grateful for the Minister's answer. With many more people getting into sport, there is also a temptation to get into image and performance-enhancing drugs. We have seen an explosion in that, with estimates of between half a million and 1 million users—and that is an underestimate—from academics, UK Anti-Doping and organisations such as ukactive, which I have met with. Will the Minister look at putting a policy in the sports strategy to gather more data on image and performance-enhancing drugs in sport?

Stuart Andrew: I praise my hon. Friend for being a doughty campaigner on this important issue and thank him for that. He has rightly raised this with me on a number of occasions. The safety and wellbeing of everyone

taking part in sport is hugely important. That includes looking at image and performance-enhancing drugs. Since I last met him, I have raised this with UKAD. We must bring about better collaboration across the Department to ensure that we tackle this issue.

Gambling-related Harms

11. **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): What steps she is taking to tackle gambling-related harms. [906079]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): I know that the hon. Member has campaigned on this issue for a number of years, and I thank her for her ongoing engagement. Our White Paper sets out measures to tackle products and practices that can drive gambling-related harm, and they include financial risk checks, stake limits on online slots and the new statutory levy.

Carolyn Harris: Loot boxes in gaming are unquestionably a slippery path to normalising gambling. This week's announcement on loot boxes nowhere near fulfils the commitment made in the 2019 Conservative party manifesto. With 55,000 young people aged 11 to 16 already classed as problem gamblers, and tens of thousands more considered at risk, why are the Government neglecting future generations by failing to tackle and prevent gambling disorder at its root?

Stuart Andrew: We have gone a long way in the White Paper to do exactly what the hon. Member says, and we have committed to ensuring that video games can be enjoyed safely by everyone. We convened a technical working group to improve protections on loot boxes, and it has published new guidance this week, which we welcome. If that guidance is implemented, it has the potential to meet our objectives, but I assure her that we will closely monitor what the industry does, to ensure that it implements the guidance in full. We will provide an update in 12 months and keep the option of legislating open.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): We would be helped in our fight against gambling-related harm if we had better data on the number of people taking their own lives as a result of gambling debts. There is a Bill that has cleared all its stages in the Lords that would get coroners to record this information. It would not cost the Government a penny. Might my right hon. Friend lend his support across Government to those responsible for that Bill, so that we have the data to know what is happening and bear down on this terrible issue?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the tragic consequences for some people. One of the toughest parts of this role has been meeting the families who have been affected in such a way. I will look at the issue he raised, but the new statutory levy enables us to have the funding to do detailed research, which could contribute to that as well.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): Affordability checks and stake limits for online gambling are of course welcome, but given that the Government have

already spent three years reviewing and consulting on gambling laws, why do we need further consultation on what levels they should be set at? There should be no more unnecessary delays. I ask the Minister, what exactly have the Government been doing all this time?

Stuart Andrew: I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want me to endanger the implementation of the policies in the White Paper if we did not follow due process, which is what we are doing at the moment. We will be starting the consultation very soon, and we are on course to implement everything by the summer of next year, as we promised.

Topical Questions

T1. [906098] **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese** (Slough) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer): The whole House has been enjoying this amazing summer of sport, with the Ashes, Wimbledon and the Grand Prix in recent weeks. The Open starts today, and I am sure the whole House will want to join me in wishing the Lionesses well in their first women's World cup match on Saturday. We believe every community should have access to sports facilities, and since our last oral questions, we have renovated a third of our target of 3,000 tennis courts across Great Britain. That is also why we have delivered improvements to over 3,300 grass-roots football facilities up and down the UK, to improve and upgrade spaces where people can get active and enjoy sport.

Mr Dhese: Indeed, the football women's World cup starts today, so we wish the very best of luck to the European champions, the fantastic Lionesses. Last year there was a staggering 83% drop in the number of European schoolchildren and students visiting the UK, hitting our tourism sector and leading to a loss of 14,500 jobs and £875 million. I am aware of the Prime Minister's vague commitment to increase the number of schoolchildren coming over from France at the very least, but what exactly is the Government's plan to deal with that shocking decline?

Lucy Frazer: I am pleased that the hon. Member mentioned the discussions that the Prime Minister has had with France. That bilateral arrangement will improve mobility to the UK. It is really important that those young groups come, and I can assure the hon. Member that I am looking at that issue more broadly.

T2. [906099] **Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): One of my constituents, Wendy Metcalfe, has represented England as part of the England women's shore angling team. However, she has recently expressed concerns that a trans woman has been selected to join the squad. Beach fishing requires significant upper body strength, strength in which a male-born competitor would have a distinct advantage over a woman. Will the Minister please confirm that she will speak to the Angling Trust to request that it properly considers the Sports Council Equality Group's guidance on who is eligible for its women's team?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): These are clearly sensitive issues, and they need careful consideration and respect for those involved. The Government support the Sports Council's guidance on transgender participation. When it comes to competitive sport, we believe that safety and fairness have to be the primary considerations. I encourage the Angling Trust to engage with the Sports Council's guidance as it develops its thinking in this area.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): Our creative industries are world leading, but they are rightly concerned about the impact of artificial intelligence on their creative endeavours. The Government's botched AI and intellectual property plans show that our creative industries play second fiddle when we need genuine partnership between the tech sector and those industries. What is the Secretary of State doing to secure, protect and enhance this British success story in the digital age?

Lucy Frazer: The shadow Minister is right to highlight AI, which presents potential opportunities as well as challenges, particularly in the domain of copyright and the creative industries. I am actively engaged with this issue and have held a number of meetings with the sector, including with the Creative Industries Council earlier this week, and with music, press and publishing stakeholders over recent weeks. This afternoon I will again meet with the Minister for AI and Intellectual Property, together with the Intellectual Property Office, to discuss this very issue.

T6. [906104] **Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Ind): Many of my constituents think that the BBC licence fee is an outdated, regressive tax, and question why they should have to fund a broadcaster that they do not support and do not want to watch. If a formal review of the BBC's funding model is indeed to take place in the autumn, surely abolishing the licence fee altogether has to be one of the options considered.

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Sir John Whittingdale): The Government have made it clear that the licence fee will remain in place for the remainder of this charter period, but my hon. Friend is right that there are challenges going forward. He may be aware that the number of people paying the licence fee has fallen by 1.9 million in the past five years, and it is therefore right that we look at possible alternative sources of funding for the BBC in the longer term. That will be the focus of the funding review.

T3. [906100] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): We all wish our women's team all the best down under in the World cup that starts today—we are all a bit envious of the Minister—but at the same time, our national team is still doing battle with the Football Association over pay. How soon do the Government expect to implement the recommendations of Karen Carney's review so that the beautiful game raises up standards for women, including Chloe Kelly from Acton, my favourite Lioness?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Lady is right to raise this important area. I am extremely grateful, as we all are in the Department, to Karen Carney for such an in-depth

review of women's football. We are obviously looking at the recommendations she made in that report, and that will be a continuous agenda item in my regular discussions with the FA.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): My right hon. Friend is aware of the ongoing crisis at Southend United, where staff have gone unpaid for months and the 117-year-old club's future is on a knife edge, which is absolutely devastating for the 6,000-plus loyal fan base. Please will my right hon. Friend agree to meet the Shrimpers Trust, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (Sir James Duddridge) and me, urgently, to see what more can be done to save this vital community asset for the new city of Southend?

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I just say that nobody else is now going to get in on topicals, because this is the last question. Minister, we do have to think about other people. It is too short a Question Time, but if it is short, we need to help each other to get through it.

Stuart Andrew: Can I praise my hon. Friend for the tremendous amount of work she has been doing on behalf of her constituents and the fans at Southend? I know how hard she is working. Of course, I would be more than happy to meet the fans group, as I have with those of other clubs, but I think this highlights the need for the independent football regulator.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Midlothian, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voter ID: National Elections

1. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What recent discussions the Committee has had with the Electoral Commission on the adequacy of the implementation of voter ID requirements for national elections. [906085]

Owen Thompson (Midlothian): I thank my hon. Friend for the question. The Committee discussed the commission's work to support the implementation of voter ID at its public evidence session in March. A transcript of that session is available on the Committee's website. The commission has also published an initial analysis of voter ID in the May local elections in England, saying that further work is required to ensure voter ID does not become a barrier to voting and that elections remain accessible to everyone. The commission is undertaking further research and will make recommendations for improvement in its full election report to be published in September, and it will continue to run public awareness activities and provide guidance to electoral administrators ahead of future elections where voter ID is required.

Martyn Day: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. The commission's interim report indicates that 14,000 people were turned away due to voter ID restrictions in England, and it warned of concerning signs that voters with disabilities, those who were unemployed or those from particular ethnic groups were disproportionately affected. Given that it says that 4% of people who did

not vote said it was due to lack of voter ID, what steps are being taken to ensure that hundreds of thousands of voters are not turned away at the next general election?

Owen Thompson: I again thank my hon. Friend for that question. It is too soon to draw conclusions about the impact of voter ID on specific groups of people, but the commission has said that some of the emerging evidence is concerning, with the example that data suggests that disabled people and those who are unemployed were more likely than others to give ID as a reason for not voting. Elections should be accessible to everyone, so the commission is working to build a better understanding of specific experiences. As I say, the commission is undertaking further research and will make recommendations in its full election report to be published in September, and it will work with the Government and the electoral community to ensure that elections remain accessible to all.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Ordinands

2. **Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): What recent steps the Church of England has taken to increase the number of ordinands. [906086]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): I am very pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that there are 1,100 clergy in training in 2022-23, and that £10.3 million has been given to 25 dioceses to fund more curacy posts and £4.3 million has been given to 19 dioceses to make sure that clergy leaving training have a post of first responsibility to go to.

Mr French: In Old Bexley and Sidcup, we are fortunate to have many fantastic churches and faith leaders supporting our community. Will my hon. Friend join me in thanking them all and congratulating St Mary the Virgin church and parish in Bexley village, which celebrates an incredible 900th anniversary this year?

Andrew Selous: I am delighted that St Mary the Virgin in Bexley will be celebrating its 900th anniversary with the Bishop of Rochester in November. I know that it is a church dedicated to serving its local community, with particularly impressive youth work, and I would like to commend the Rev. Renate Tulloh and the Bexley team ministry for all the good work that they do, which is noticed and greatly appreciated.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Midlothian, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Election Guidance

3. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Whether the Electoral Commission has issued recent guidance on elections to political parties and candidates. [906087]

Owen Thompson (Midlothian): The commission regularly publishes guidance for political parties, candidates and non-party campaigners to help them comply with their legal obligations. It recently submitted for ministerial and parliamentary approval draft statutory guidance on digital imprints and a draft code of practice for non-party campaigners. These will support parties and campaigners to understand and prepare for challenges introduced by the Elections Act 2022.

Kevin Brennan: Is the commission preparing any guidance about this new trend we have of Members of this House, who may be candidates at the next election, being given their own TV programmes on some of the new news channels and interviewing members of the Government from their own Benches in the lead-up to a general election? What is the Electoral Commission doing about that?

Owen Thompson: I thank the hon. Member for his excellent question. The Committee has not discussed those matters with the commission as yet. The Electoral Commission does not have a role in the regulation of political or news programmes. Ofcom is responsible for regulating broadcasters and providing guidance on impartiality, but if the Member wants to take up this issue further with the commission, it would be more than happy to meet him.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the commission look closely at the fact that Members of this House have television programmes? I was invited to a television programme by two Members of this House, and I did not accept that invitation. There is surely something wrong with Members in this House asking questions at the same time as they are running very political campaigns on television. What will the hon. Gentleman do about that?

Owen Thompson: The point is well made. As I have said, the Committee has not discussed this matter with the commission, but I am sure that the comments made by hon. Members will be heard. As I offered to the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), I am sure that if the hon. Member for Huddersfield wanted to discuss this matter further with the commission, it would be more than happy to meet him.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners was asked—

Community Sponsorship Scheme

4. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What recent steps the Church of England has taken to participate in the community sponsorship scheme. [906088]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): I am able to reassure my right hon. Friend that the Church remains closely involved with the Ukraine community sponsorship scheme. Many bishops and churchgoers and hundreds of clergy have opened their homes to host Ukrainian evacuees.

Sir Desmond Swayne: That is reassuring, given the wind-up that the bishops raised in the House of Lords over the Illegal Migration Bill. What more can the Church do to encourage people to support and take in Ukrainians?

Andrew Selous: The Church of England is developing a new strategy for community sponsorship, building on the launch of community sponsorship in 2016 by Amber Rudd, when Home Secretary, and the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace. The Church will continue to use its presence in every community to raise the profile of community sponsorship, as it has been demonstrated to work well for all concerned.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Midlothian, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Political Donations from Overseas

5. **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Whether the Committee has had recent discussions with the Electoral Commission on the transparency of political donations from overseas. [906091]

Owen Thompson (Midlothian): The Committee has not had a recent discussion with the commission on that issue. The commission publishes information about donations to ensure transparency, and it has powers to sanction political parties that accept impermissible foreign donations. It has highlighted that the political finance system is vulnerable to unlawful influence from donations overseas and in the UK, and it has recommended that parties should be required to know not just who a donor is but where the money for the donation is coming from. It has also recommended that parties have policies in place to manage the risk of receiving money from unlawful sources. The commission has said that parties should not be permitted to accept donations from companies that exceed their profits made in the UK.

Chris Stephens: The executive director of Spotlight on Corruption, Susan Hawley, says that the Tory UK Government's "abject failure" to take decisive action on overseas donations is concerning our allies. She also says that elections are at risk of interference from Russia and other hostile states after the Government opposed the move to require political parties to verify and disclose the source of political donations. What steps is the commission taking to prevent overseas donations from hostile states that undermine electoral law? Has the commission asked the security services to undertake a review of political finance?

Owen Thompson: Speaking as a representative of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, it would be a matter for the security services to make a full assessment of whether unlawful foreign money has been used to campaign in UK elections. However, political parties must report when they are given an unlawful donation and return it to the donor. In addition, the commission carries out checks on permissibility on a sample of donations and has the power to sanction

political parties that accept impermissible foreign donations. The commission has said that it takes all possible steps within the current regulatory framework to prevent unlawful foreign money from entering UK politics, and it publishes information about donations to ensure transparency. It has the powers to sanction, but it cannot take enforcement actions against organisations based outside the UK. The commission will continue to recommend changes to ensure that voters can have greater confidence in political finance in the UK.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners was asked—

Uganda: Anti-Homosexuality Act

6. **Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con): What discussions the Church of England has had with churches in Uganda following the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023 in that country. [906092]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): The Archbishop of Canterbury has written directly to Archbishop Kaziimba of Uganda reminding him of the commitment made by the Anglican communion to treat every person with the care and respect they deserve as children of God and that the communion opposes the criminalisation of LGBT+ people. The Archbishop of Canterbury has said that the Act was a fundamental departure from the commitment to uphold the freedom and dignity of all people; it was not in our resolutions, not in our teachings and not in the Gospel of Jesus we share together.

Peter Gibson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his response and for the concern shared by the Archbishop of Canterbury. What more can the Church say to Anglicans across the UK who do not in any way, shape or form believe the death penalty for any crime is compatible with Christian teaching, and to those members of the LGBT community who are rightly horrified by events in Uganda?

Andrew Selous: I very much understand my hon. Friend's concern on this issue, which is shared by many others. As I am sure he knows, each province of the Anglican communion is autonomous. In 2016, however, the primates in the Anglican communion reaffirmed the rejection of criminal sanctions against same sex-attracted people and committed to respecting the dignity and value of every person. It is hard to see how the position taken by the Church of Uganda aligns with the 2016 agreement.

Ordination of Clergy

7. **Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): If the Church of England will make an assessment of the potential merits of refusing to ordain clergy who do not personally recognise the ordination of women as diocesan bishops. [906093]

Andrew Selous: The Church of England is fully committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all without reference to gender. The Church is also committed to ensuring that those who cannot in good

conscience receive the ministry of women priests or bishops are able to flourish; the five guiding principles of the House of Bishops are the basis for this mutual flourishing and all candidates for ordination have to assent to them.

Dame Diana Johnson: It is now 29 years since we had the first woman priest and nine years since the first female bishop was appointed in our established Church of England. It therefore seems to me that there have been many years to adapt to treating women as equals in the sight of God. Given that, is it really appropriate for the Church of England to continue appointing clergy, as happened recently in Blackburn, who have not accepted and who will never personally accept the ordination of women?

Andrew Selous: I can tell the right hon. Lady that a new body was established last year to review how the five guiding principles are being understood, implemented and received in the Church and that it has a balanced membership of bishops, clergy and laity who reflect all views on these matters.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I speak as a supporter of WATCH, the Women and the Church group. The Church Commissioners should understand that either the Church of England gets rid of what ought to have been temporary exemptions from the Equality Act 2010 or Parliament will do that for it. Does my hon. Friend understand that other MPs who are interested in full equality for women would like to meet the Church Commissioners before we consider what other action we might take?

Andrew Selous: I have very clearly heard what my hon. Friend the Father of the House and indeed the very respected Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) have just said. The Church will have heard that as well and we are of course available for meetings at any time.

Freedom of Religion and Belief

8. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What recent steps the Church of England has taken to help protect freedom of religion and belief in other countries. [906094]

Andrew Selous: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend, who serves with distinction as the Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, that the United Nations Security Council has recently adopted a resolution to produce an annual report on freedom of religion and belief. It was sponsored by the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates, and the resolution was based on the Bishop of Truro's review and incorporates many of his original recommendations.

Fiona Bruce: That is indeed a very positive development. My hon. Friend will have seen another report, produced by former BBC reporter David Campanale and other FORB experts for the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, which I chair, on the ongoing major violence in Manipur, India. It indicates that since early

May alone hundreds of churches there have been destroyed, many burnt to the ground; more than 100 people have been killed and over 50,000 displaced; and schools and seminaries have been targeted in what looks like systematic and premeditated attacks with religion a key factor. There has been very little reporting about this. People there are calling out for help; what can the Church do to draw more attention to their cries?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend has done a great service by putting this matter on the record in the House. I am sure that she, like me, would like to see much greater reporting of these issues by the BBC and others. What she has told us is truly shocking, and I know that the Archbishop of Canterbury, who visited India in 2019 to see the challenges at first hand, remains extremely concerned that such attacks have been worsening and spreading to other minority faith communities, so I will bring my hon. Friend's report on Manipur directly to the Archbishop's attention.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his response to the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who does such fantastic work as the ambassador for not only the Prime Minister but all of us in the House.

In February, I visited Pakistan with the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief. Further to what the hon. Gentleman said, will he advise the House on what steps the Church of England is taking to support the Anglican ministry in Pakistan and to defend the rights of Pakistani Christians to practise their faith and express their beliefs without fear of repression?

Andrew Selous: I talked earlier this week with Dr Sammy Wainaina, the Archbishop's new adviser on Anglican communion affairs, and he specifically mentioned Pakistan, so I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned it. He is right that the situation there is extremely challenging—priests have been murdered—and the Archbishop

visited quite recently. I express particular gratitude to the two hon. Members who have put these matters on the record this morning; they are right to do so and I hope they continue to do so.

Family Relationships, Parenting and Marriage

9. **Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Ind): To ask the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent steps the Church of England has taken to help support family relationships, parenting and marriage. [906095]

Andrew Selous: The Archbishop's recent "Love Matters" commission on family issues made 36 recommendations for the Church of England and 29 for the Government. They included supporting family hubs, developing high-quality marriage preparation, and building relational capability at all life stages and not just for couples who are preparing for marriage. I will place a copy of that report and the previous ones in the Library.

Scott Benton: A strong and stable family unit undoubtedly provides the best environment in which to raise children. What steps is the Church of England taking to provide relationship support and guidance to those families who need it to help them to stay together?

Andrew Selous: That is a really important question. The Children's Commissioner has pointed out that almost a quarter of UK families are headed by a lone parent; that compares with an average of an eighth of families in Europe. The Bishop of Durham, who co-chaired the commission, wants to see every deanery in the Church of England offering the very best marriage preparation to all couples, and for the Church to support their relationships at every life stage.

10.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Business of the House

10.30 am

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): The business for the week commencing 4 September will be:

MONDAY 4 SEPTEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, followed by Committee of the whole House and remaining stages of the Northern Ireland Budget (No. 2) Bill.

TUESDAY 5 SEPTEMBER—Remaining stages of the Energy Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER—If necessary, consideration of Lords message to the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, followed by an Opposition day (18th allotted day second part) debate in the name of the official Opposition, subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 7 SEPTEMBER—Debate on a motion on hormone pregnancy tests, followed by a general debate on funding for the prevention of fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 8 SEPTEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 11 September includes:

MONDAY 11 SEPTEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Online Safety Bill.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business, but I am disappointed that two pieces of important House business seem to be missing. First, there was no mention of when MPs will get to debate and vote on the Commission's proposals to introduce a new process for dealing with MPs accused of violent or sexual offences. The Leader of the House was not able to answer me when I asked about the matter last week, so I would be grateful if she could do so today. She and I have worked hard on this together, as well as with you, Mr Speaker, the commissioners, staff and the trade unions. We cannot lose momentum. I know the Leader of the House agrees with me that the proposed new mechanism is needed to reduce the risk of harm to all those who work on and visit the parliamentary estate, so will she give us some clarity, show all the people listening that we are making progress and tell us when the House will get the chance to vote on it?

I am also concerned that the Leader of the House has still not announced when the House will consider the Standards Committee's report on the conduct of the right hon. Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), the findings of which are shocking. Colleagues and staff have been asking when the House will get the opportunity to approve the report and endorse the sanction. He has brought this House into disrepute and frankly should no longer be a Member of it. Will the Leader of the House tell us whether she knows if the Member will be resigning or if he has appealed the Committee's sanction? Either way, she could table the motion as a remaining order, even without a date attached. When will she bring forward a motion so that the House can vote and move on?

I wish all Members, Members' staff, House staff and everyone who works on the parliamentary estate a very happy summer recess. As we come to the end of term and head back to work in our own communities, it is worth reflecting on what the Government have achieved—or not—this year. People I have been speaking to up and down the country are simply fed up. Nothing works in this country any more, and the Tories have simply given up doing anything about it. I saw on the Order Paper today that the Leader of the House is due to announce the date of the next King's Speech in a written ministerial statement—perhaps I could press her to give us an early sighting of that now—but the Government have nowhere near finished with the last set of new laws they said they were going to pass.

The Prime Minister has been caught out, overpromising and massively under-delivering, including on the Renters (Reform) Bill, which was initially promised four years ago and so many Members across the House said they wanted. There is no transport Bill, no schools Bill and no mental health Bill. Why does the Leader of the House think that working people will believe that this Government are going to make people's lives better this time? On top of all that, prices are still going up at staggering rates, and families are bearing the brunt of the Tory cost of living crisis. That is what the people of Selby and Ainsty, Uxbridge and South Ruislip, and Somerton and Frome will be thinking about when they head to the ballot box today, fed up and wanting change.

Labour is the party of change. We have a proper plan to grow our economy, to bring down Bills, to secure the energy this country needs and to tackle climate change. People will have welcomed the opportunity to vote Labour today in three constituencies, and send the Tories a message, but is it not time that we had a general election, so the whole country gets the chance to have their say?

Penny Mordaunt: First, let me put on the record my good wishes to the Lionesses for their first match on Saturday.

Of course, after hearing the tragic news today, our thoughts are with all those caught up in the Auckland shooting.

May I also mention our pride at what our nation has done to speed up new solutions to tackling dementia, following the announcement of a future new drug this week? With the 2013 G8 dementia push by David Cameron, which led to the World Dementia Council, the 2015 joint dementia research platform and the Prime Minister's challenge on dementia, our 2019 funding commitments and the establishment of the Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Mission, our nation and this Government have done more than any other to tackle this issue, and I think we should all take great pride in that.

Turning to the issues raised by the shadow Leader of the House, regarding the report on the right hon. Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), she will know that he has a right of appeal. That runs out at the end of today, so we are not able to do anything until the House returns from recess. As she knows, I do not control the timetable for that; it is controlled by the Standards Committee when it publishes its report. That is the process. As a member of the Commission, she knows what work we have been doing, and I am grateful to her for acknowledging on the record my commitment to the

[Penny Mordaunt]

scheme to ensure that everyone who works on the estate is properly protected and we have good safeguarding policies in place. As soon as we have a settled scheme, we will bring forward the debate on it.

I, too, thank all colleagues and the staff of the House for the work they have done. We have achieved a tremendous amount. In the last nine months, we have introduced 16 Bills in addition to reintroducing the Data Protection and Digital Information (No. 2) Bill. Ten Government Bills have reached Royal Assent, with more to follow shortly. We have published two draft Bills, which are undergoing pre-legislative scrutiny—the Media Bill and the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill—and 13 private Member's Bills have reached Royal Assent, with three more to follow shortly.

I thank all colleagues for helping with the legislative agenda to support delivery, including of the Prime Minister's five priorities—the things that matter the most to the people of this country—as we recover from the pandemic and global shocks. In stark contrast to the picture painted by the shadow Leader of the House, we are delivering. We are tackling debt, halving inflation and growing our economy. We are taking responsible decisions to get debt falling, helping households with the cost of living and addressing inflation through measures including energy bill support, fuel duty cuts and increasing competition.

Yesterday, we had better than expected falling inflation figures; today, we have seen average mortgage rates falling for the first time in many months. We are controlling spending and increasing public sector productivity. The Office for Budget Responsibility said that measures in the Budget caused it to revise its growth forecast up; we have received the largest ever upward forecast of the G7 this year, and our long-term growth forecasts are stronger than those for Germany, France and Italy.

We are also working to cut waiting lists. We are creating 160 new diagnostic centres, 108 of which are already open. We are delivering 4 million additional scans and tests, 100 new operating theatres delivering 2 million more operations by the next financial year, and over 12,000 more nurses than a year ago and 5,000 more doctors—we have smashed our manifesto commitments on recruitment. New digital health checks are preventing strokes and heart attacks. Record funding will deliver 9 million more procedures over the next three years, a 30% increase in elective activity and 5,000 more hospital beds. We are releasing 10 million more doctor's appointments through our Pharmacy First service.

Finally, we are stopping the boats. We have taken new powers to protect our border, even though the Labour party voted to dismantle the Bill more than 70 times. We have 700 more staff working in immigration enforcement and we have increased the number of caseworkers dealing with the backlog. Since the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 was passed, 653 people have been arrested, leading to convictions totalling over 170 years of jail time. Home Office initial asylum decisions are up 30% on last year, and small boats arrivals are down 10%. Some 11,000 small boat crossings have been thwarted, and illegal working enforcement visits are up 50%.

On top of all that, this week we concluded our accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership and launched Great British

Nuclear, and after business questions, we will have a statement on £4 billion of investment in a new gigafactory. We continue to work on the things that matter to the people of this country. These are tough times, but we are delivering, and that is what we will be judged on, and in these tough times, I am glad that it is my party at the helm.

I can confirm that the state opening of Parliament will take place on 7 November. I wish everyone a happy recess. Finally: vote Purbrick, Tuckwell and Holmes!

Mr Speaker: I call Sir Peter Bottomley, the Father of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Yesterday, thanks to my right hon. Friend and Team Lewis, I was able to meet Les Wateridge, who, as many will know, spent decades keeping the streets of Westminster clear, especially around Victoria Tower Gardens. The day before, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch came to Parliament. She is 98. She was in the women's orchestra at Auschwitz, and then survived Bergen-Belsen. May I invite the Government, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and the leaders of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation to meet Anita, and hear her views on why the proposed memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens is too large for the gardens, and too small to be a proper memorial to those who died while she was incarcerated?

Penny Mordaunt: I know that my hon. Friend cares very deeply about this issue and the memorial, as do all Members of the House, despite their different views. As we are going into recess, there will not be an opportunity for him to question either the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on this matter, so I shall make sure that they hear of his invitation, and I shall write to them on his behalf.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the SNP spokesperson.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): This may be the last time I face the Leader of the House at business questions; if the rumours are true, she is about to be moved again in yet another “deckchairs on the Tory Titanic” reshuffle. It is a shame; she was just getting the hang of business questions, by which I mean that, like other Tory Ministers at the Dispatch Box, she consistently avoids answering the question. If anyone doubts that, last week, when I asked her about the Prime Minister's inflation and debt pledges, I got a lecture in response about nuclear weapons and afternoon coffee breaks, and then she described me as “delusional”.

There is no hope that the Government will change course; 13 years of austerity and incompetence are baked in. We are talking about a Government who forced Brexit on Scotland, and who refuse to allow the Scots even the right to choose their own future; a Budget that tanked the economy and pushed the pensions sector to the brink of collapse; an inhuman and degrading immigration regime; former Prime Ministers who cannot even remember their phone passwords for a covid inquiry; and a current PM who appears to think that arguing with banks on behalf of an individual is the most important thing to focus on in the midst of a cost of living crisis, and just a day before three by-elections. Doctors, nurses and teachers are all striking in England. According to the Transport Secretary, it is now expected

that political parties will pay out for the actions of their donors and associates—a surprising tack to take, as his party can now surely expect a veritable torrent of invoices to wing their way to Conservative HQ in the near future.

The people of Scotland know, of course, that there is a better way than what we have to put up with here. Scotland has hope of a better way than endless Westminster failures and arrogance; it has hope of a future that holds real prospects of a better life for our families and communities. Probably for the last time, in the vain hope of an answer, I ask a question of the Leader of the House: with food inflation still running at an estimated 17.3%, can we have a debate on how the Government got us in such a hopeless mess?

Penny Mordaunt: Let me start by saying how much I enjoy our exchange every week, and how disappointed I should be if it were, indeed, to be our last. However, I feel that it is my duty to point out to the hon. Lady the error of what she asserts. She talks about denying the people of Scotland a choice in respect of their future. We are the Government who gave the Scottish people, as well as other residents of the United Kingdom, a vote on their future, in respect of both Scottish independence and Brexit. The difference between the hon. Lady's party and mine is that we honour the results of referendums.

I know that the hon. Lady and her party have been campaigning hard on the two-child policy this week, so let me illustrate the powers and the opportunities that sit in her party's hands. It may interest her to know that the projected black hole in the SNP's budget, identified by the Scottish Fiscal Commission as a huge £1.9 billion in the next four years, is enough money not only to reverse that policy in Scotland, but to reverse it for the whole of the UK. As a Minister at the Department for Work and Pensions, I was amazed at the lengths to which the SNP would go not to take control over many aspects of welfare policy that we wished to devolve to it, choosing instead to criticise the UK Government for the decisions that they were making. The hon. Lady's party is in power in Scotland. It pains me that it is in power, but it is and has been for many years, so it is time that its Members took some responsibility.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Earlier this week, in the Pakistani province of Sindh, two Hindu temples were ransacked and 30 women and children were taken hostage by armed insurgents. They are claiming that until a young Pakistani woman, Seema Haider, who wishes to marry an Indian man, returns to Pakistan, they will not release the women and children. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has condemned the move. May I ask my right hon. Friend to urge the Foreign Secretary to make the strongest possible representations to the Pakistani authorities to ensure that the women and children are freed and returned to their homes and loved ones immediately?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing the House's attention to a very serious situation, as he so often does. He is the second highest attender of business questions, and he always raises important matters. We are deeply concerned about this situation. I will make sure that the Foreign Secretary is fully aware of it, and we urge the Pakistani authorities to investigate any allegations fully, prosecute those responsible, and provide justice for the victims and their families.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Perhaps I am the next most prolific attender.

I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement and, in particular, for announcing the Backbench Business for the week beginning Monday 4 September. If we are awarded the time, we shall have a very interesting topic to debate on Thursday 14 September, namely the relationship between football and early-onset dementia. The application for that debate is well subscribed. I also thank the Leader of the House for writing to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on my behalf following last week's exchange. That was an important topic as well, and it was referred to earlier this morning during questions to the Secretary of State.

You may remember, Mr Speaker, that 21 April is my birthday—a birthday that I shared with Her late Majesty the Queen. On 21 April this year, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities raising the serious concerns of constituents who continue to be affected by ongoing fire safety concerns following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. I have not had the birthday present of a reply since 21 April. I had sought the Secretary of State's advice on how leaseholders should proceed when a developer had signed up to the Government's much-publicised charter but then refused to pay for the cost of any initial surveys to ascertain what works need to be done. Many hundreds of leaseholders in Gateshead are stuck in limbo, unable to sell or pay for remedial works and unable to pay for surveys. Will the Leader of the House please ask the Secretary of State to respond to my request on behalf of my constituents?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his top attendance at business questions and for the helpful advert for future debates and opportunities to secure them.

I am sorry that he has not yet received a response—that is well out of time. Given that we are going into recess and these are issues that all our constituents will be facing, I shall contact the Secretary of State, as the hon. Gentleman requests, and ask him to update colleagues, perhaps by a “Dear colleague” letter, so that we know the best advice to give our constituents on these important matters.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): May we have a debate on the importance of local high streets, so that I can express my opposition to ideas floated by BYM Capital to redevelop the Spires shopping centre in Barnet High Street? The plans involve too many flats and buildings that are far too high, and unless they are changed, they must be rejected.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for her focus on matters that I am sure are of great concern to her constituents. She will know that successive Conservative Administrations have felt it important to devolve powers down to a local level, to give local residents more control over shaping their local plan and the design guides that accompany it. She raises an important point and I know that she will be campaigning on behalf of her constituents to ensure that the right decision is taken.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): Summer holidays should be a time for children to get out and about and enjoy themselves, but almost half of parents say that the cost of living crisis has had a negative impact on the number of opportunities their children have to be physically active and to take part in sport. May we have a debate, in Government time, on the impact of the cost of living crisis on the ability of children, particularly those from low-income families, to participate in the sports they love?

Penny Mordaunt: That is an important matter and a timely one, as we are going into the summer recess. The hon. Lady will know that the Government spend about £200 million on holiday activities for families and, through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, we work with many sporting bodies that will be offering particular activities, especially over the summer, that enable people to try new activities and take them up, whatever their resources. I will ask the Secretary of State to update all Members on what those opportunities might be, but I know that many sporting organisations take their outreach work and support for all communities very seriously indeed.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): I have another sports question. Our community sports organisations in Wolverhampton do so much for public health, whether it is Wednesfield Aces cycle speedway, Fordhouses cricket club or our two gurdwaras. May we have a debate on support and funding for grassroots sports organisations? Will the Leader of the House also join me in congratulating Henry Searle, the first British tennis player to lift the Wimbledon boys championship title, which he did last Sunday? The whole of Wolverhampton is beaming with pride at Henry's achievement. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend will be able to tell by the noises from around the Chamber that we all want to congratulate Henry on that fantastic achievement. She will know how to apply for a debate in the usual way. I know that many colleagues value the support and funding that goes into grassroots sports. She will know that that has been a priority for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero has provided additional funds for sporting venues, such as swimming pools, that have very high energy costs, to ensure that access to those important facilities is maintained.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): This morning, Viaplay, the broadcaster rights holder for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish men's football teams, announced that it was trying to sell off all of its UK-based rights. A meeting was promised by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport back in December and despite my continual chasing since then, including bringing up the matter at business questions with the Leader of the House and at Prime Minister's questions in recent weeks, I have still not been able to secure a meeting with the Secretary of State. Will the Leader of the House give her a nudge so that we can have this urgent meeting?

A few weeks ago, I had the honour and privilege of meeting Miss J, a campaigning survivor who is trying to raise awareness of the toxic culture and sexual misconduct in sport. Importantly, she is trying to get all professional

sports teams in Scotland to sign up to and implement a sexual misconduct policy as soon as possible. Will the Leader of the House join me in supporting the important work that Miss J is carrying out and make time for a statement to tell us what the Government are doing on this important issue?

Penny Mordaunt: With regard to the first issue, I remember writing to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and her Department to ask her to do that, so I will chase it up. If the hon. Gentleman gives me more information about the policy that his constituent is championing—it sounds very worthwhile—I will raise that with the Secretary of State as well. I wish his constituent good luck in what they are trying to achieve.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Virgin Media recently upgraded some landlines in Cleethorpes, but it advised its customers via text that there would be a short period of disconnection. Unfortunately, not everyone has access to texts, such as the 92-year-old lady in my constituency who brought the matter to my attention. Can we have a debate about how these large organisations exclude many people who do not have broadband or mobile connections?

Penny Mordaunt: There were audible groans across the Chamber at that, because we all know of companies that do not enable all their customers to get access to the information they need. It is quite lazy. One thing the Government can do is ensure that we are increasing competition. Work that the Prime Minister commissioned while he was Chancellor is enabling that, and further competition is supported by many of the Bills we brought forward in this Session. I hope that Virgin Media has heard what has been said on the Floor of the House today and will reconsider its approach to communicating with their valuable customers.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Ind): The report into the North East Ambulance Service is now in the public domain, and the Department for Health and Social Care has responded with what I understand to be an open letter. Given the seriousness of the matters inquired into, and the fact that the process was initiated by a whistleblower to a national newspaper, will there be an opportunity for the House to debate the report?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising this serious matter, and I shall ensure that the Secretary of State has heard his request. I am sure that the House will want to focus on the matter, particularly those Members whose constituents are directly affected. The right hon. Gentleman obviously knows how to apply for a debate if he wants to, but I will make sure that the Department hears what he has said today.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): At the weekend I visited Brumby gymnastics club, where I met Gail and Rick Brady. They have been volunteering at the club for 40 years, making a tremendous contribution to the community in Scunthorpe. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating and thanking them for that work? Will she also support a debate in Government time so that we can recognise and support the people who do such fantastic work in our communities?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sure we all join my hon. Friend in thanking Rick and Gail for their incredible work for her constituents over many decades. She is right to praise the contribution that volunteers make to our communities, and the Government also value that, which was one of the driving forces behind the Points of Light award. If my hon. Friend applies for a debate, I am sure that it would be well attended, with lots of pats on backs for the many thousands of volunteers who do such great work in their communities day in, day out.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): As we go into recess, I have been struck by the number of right hon. and hon. Members who have told me that they intend to take their summer holidays in Orkney and Shetland this year. I am sure that, like the rest of the world, they are attracted by our breathtaking scenery, our wildlife, our birdlife, our world heritage sites and our quality local food and drink offering. I fear that we are also attractive to MPs because in so many parts of the Northern Isles, they will not be bothered by their mobile phone ringing. It is great for holidaying MPs, but it is a bit of a pain for the rest of us, so when we come back in September, can we have an update from her ministerial colleagues on the shared rural network scheme?

Penny Mordaunt: I congratulate the right hon. Member on providing a wonderful advert for any Members who are not planning on holidaying in his constituency and reasons why they should. He raises a serious matter, and I will certainly ensure that the two Departments that are most relevant to this have heard what he said.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): Darlington rotary club will be celebrating its centenary this year. The club has contributed significantly to our local community and I praise it for all the work it does. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Darlington rotary club on its centenary and will she find time for us to have a debate on the significant and tangible impact of rotary in our communities across the UK?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is right about the incredible contribution that rotary clubs make, and not just to work in the UK—if we were to draw up a list of organisations that have helped to eradicate polio around the world, rotary clubs would be at the top of it, having enabled vaccination programmes to take place all over the world. I understand that he is a Rotarian, as is our Prime Minister at the same rotary club as him, so I think the centenary party will be quite something.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Last week, I had the privilege of seeing the fantastic graduation show of Newcastle Theatre Royal's Project A, which provides intensive, world-class, affordable training for actors in the north-east and Newcastle. I also recently saw the wonderful West End symphony orchestra, which provides intensive one-to-one tuition but is about to lose its funding. Project A is hugely over-subscribed. Can we have a debate in Government time on what the Government are doing to ensure that the arts are accessible to working-class and regional talent? While we are at it, given that Mickey Mouse is probably the most valuable creation to come from an artist's pen, can the Leader of the House tell me when an arts degree is a Mickey Mouse degree?

Penny Mordaunt: I said last week that the nation is not just STEM-powered—the hon. Lady is a great champion for that. It is also STEAM-powered. The arts and cultural and creative industries are incredibly important to this economy. She will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Department for Culture, Media and Sport and her predecessors have done a huge amount of work to ensure that the whole of the UK gets its fair share of funding to support these sectors and that the enjoyment of their products is accessible to all.

I am sure the hon. Lady has raised those specific projects with the Secretary of State. If she has not had an opportunity to do that, I am happy to do so on her behalf. She will soon be able to get a clear map of all the funding that has gone into her local area over many years, and having seen a draft of the map, I think it is considerable.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Although it is welcome to see school budgets increasing again, can we look at the situation whereby schools in my constituency and central Bedfordshire get a lot less per pupil than those just over the border in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire? We are amending the police funding formula to make it fairer. Can we please look at the same issue for school funding? It really is not fair to differentiate in that way.

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend raises a very important matter and he is absolutely right. We are increasing per pupil funding. We have introduced additional support for special educational needs, and we have been doing a lot of work in the capital programme to restore school buildings and enable new schools to be established. However, given that we are going into recess, I will write on his behalf to the Secretary of State for Education and the Chancellor to ensure that they consider this matter.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I am sure the Leader of the House will agree that, when a Minister gives an undertaking in the Chamber to meet with an hon. Member, an official in the Box ought to be making a note and following up. That system seems to have broken down, and hon. Members' staff spend an age trying to chase down those in ministerial private offices. Mr Speaker, I am sure both you and the Leader of the House will be surprised to hear that my office was recently told that the Home Office switchboard had no record of the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), the Minister for Immigration—[*Laughter.*] It is not really funny. Clearly, from what my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) said earlier, this is a problem affecting all hon. Members. Can we have a debate in Government time on the quality of ministerial responses to requests made on the Floor of this House?

Penny Mordaunt: I hope the hon. and learned Lady knows I take this matter very seriously. Being able to get hold of people, particularly during recess, is extremely important. If she would like to give me and my office some details about the specific issue she is trying to get an answer on, I would be happy to follow that up, and I will give the Home Office a nudge to ensure that all hon. Members are able to get hold of Ministers during recess in particular, if something should happen during the break.

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): As the Government forge ahead with initiatives, policies and trade deals that we were unable to do when we were a member of the EU, would my right hon. Friend allow a debate on Brexit benefits, particularly the support the UK Government are giving to fishing and seafood processing companies and our preparedness as we take back full control of all our fishing quotas in 2026?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; one of the reasons we left the EU was to enable those opportunities across all sectors, but particularly fishing and food producers. We negotiated successfully a significant uplift in our quota shares following our exit from the EU, as she well knows, valued at about £101 million in new fishing opportunities for the UK fleet in this year alone. The UK seafood fund is investing £100 million into the long-term future of the UK fisheries sector, helping to drive innovation, support job creation and boost seafood exports into new markets—*[Interruption.]* I heard a yell from a sedentary position; I am not sure quite who it came from. Those opportunities could be maximised if the Scottish Government engaged more with their local coastal communities on their plans for protected marine areas.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I hope the Leader of the House will agree that we have a pretty good tradition in this country of open, free, democratic, honest elections. Does she share my concern that there is evidence in the recent past—not just in the UK, but elsewhere—of malign influences on elections from China, from Russia and even, some people have said, from India? Will she ensure that we have an early debate when the House gets back, since an election is imminent, to look at ways of protecting our democracy from foreign influences of all kinds?

Penny Mordaunt: This is an extremely important issue and I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising it. He will know that my right hon. Friend the Security Minister is leading a taskforce designed to protect and strengthen democracy, primarily in the UK, although it will also have benefits for other nations around the world. Our democracy is precious; we cannot take it for granted and, if people start to lose trust in it, the system will fail. Maintaining that trust is one of the most important jobs that we have in this House and I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman were to apply for a debate, it would be well attended.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Can we have a debate about law enforcement across the United Kingdom? The Leader of the House will be aware that yesterday Scotland's Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone confirmed that the initial probe into SNP finances, looking at fraud, has been expanded to look at possible embezzlement and misuse of funds. It has already seen the arrest of former First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon, along with other senior SNP members. Does the Leader of the House agree that that shows how serious the investigation into the SNP's murky finances is?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend's question follows that asked by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), about trust in democracy and our institutions. That is incredibly important. Whatever our

differences and whichever side of the House we sit on, we should all be able to agree that trust and confidence in those systems are vital. That is why standards and having strong, democratic institutions matter.

We have had over 22 police investigations into the SNP. The original £600,000-plus that went missing has now been exceeded by the £800,000 in police time that has been spent on those investigations. It is a very sad and sorry state. Whatever shape future investigations take, I hope they are resolved swiftly, because this has been a sorry chapter.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): For the first time since 1961, UK Government debt has risen above 100% of GDP, with the Office for National Statistics revealing that net debt reached £2.6 trillion as of the end of May. In that context, the cost of replacing Trident could rise to between £287 million and £639 million. Given the huge pressure on public finances, will the Leader of the House make a statement, which I know my constituents in North Ayrshire and Arran will be very interested in, setting out whether she believes a blank cheque for replacing Trident is either acceptable or sustainable?

Penny Mordaunt: In reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), I have already given the SNP a lesson in balancing the books. I do not think this Government should take any lessons from the SNP Government, who have nearly £2 billion between what they spend and what is in their budget. In addition to understanding the cost and price of everything, it is also important for us, in this place, to understand the value of things. Trident is a nuclear deterrent. There is no blank cheque for that nuclear deterrent, but it is there doing a vital job. If hon. Members cannot see the merits of us having a deterrent at this moment, I do not know that they will ever be able to grasp that.

Any arguments about the defence of this nation relate to our commitment to NATO. The SNP purports to support that commitment, but having a nuclear deterrent is pretty fundamental to being a member of NATO. If all those arguments have failed in the past, let me try a new one: I am sure that among the hon. Lady's constituents she will have a submariner. She should ask that submariner why they are prepared to spend 10 years of their life underwater, in the service of this country. These are not trivial matters and she needs to grasp the reality of the situation facing us.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Ind): Many of my constituents were disappointed to see that the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill was not taken forward. I know that the Government are still committed to enacting the various provisions within the Bill, but will the Leader of the House provide a timetable for that?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend will know that I will say that further business will be announced in the usual way. He is right that we are committed to the measures in that Bill. We think that we will be able to bring forward some of them faster using other means, such as a statutory instrument, rather than through the passage of the Bill as previously scheduled. I will announce business in the usual way, but I can give him the assurance that we are committed to those important measures, which were manifesto commitments.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Can we please have a debate on the issue of tackling the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation? We know that tackling demand has to be at the heart of any strategy. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe has just produced a country report on the UK, which says:

“With regard to prevention, the UK does not appear to be taking substantive steps to tackle the demand that fosters trafficking for sexual exploitation, despite the international legal obligation to do so.”

At the Home Affairs Committee yesterday, the Safeguarding Minister, the hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines), said:

“For sex work, the demand is there; it is unfortunately part of human nature. I would like it to be outlawed.”

Penny Mordaunt: The right hon. Lady raises an important matter. I shall certainly make sure that the Home Office has heard her concerns about that report. She will know, though, that it is not just the Home Office that focuses on this issue, but the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and other Departments. We have done more than any previous Government on introducing new laws to protect women and girls. At the FCDO, we have our international strategy on protecting women and girls, with a particular focus on violence against women and girls. She will know that we fund many initiatives around the world through our aid programmes that combat trafficking for these purposes. She will also know that the next questions to the Department are on 18 September. Given that that is some time away, I shall write on her behalf.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): My constituent David Corroyer sadly contracted the life-changing disease hepatitis C while donating blood. With Hepatitis Awareness Week starting next week, please can we have a debate on what progress the Government are making to meet their target of eliminating hep C in 2025? Would the Leader of the House join me in praising the Hepatitis C Trust for, hopefully, helping us to get there five years before global targets?

Penny Mordaunt: This is an important matter. I will join my hon. Friend in praising the work of the Hepatitis C Trust. Those targets are ambitious, but we are determined to smash them years earlier. She will know that we have been doing a tremendous amount of work globally to combat hep C. As she will not have the opportunity to raise this with the Secretary of State before the recess, I shall also make sure that he has heard her interest in this area.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Reclaim): Since mid-2022, we have been suffering from excess deaths in the UK. So far this year, we have been seeing around 8% excess mortality. On a weekly basis, that means that around 950 more of our constituents are passing away each week than the five-year average. I have been requesting a debate on this matter regularly for the past six months to no avail. I can understand why the Government do not wish to debate this topic, but the silence from the Opposition parties is perplexing. May I ask the Leader of the House when the public will get an opportunity to witness a debate in this House on this issue of life and death that is affecting them, their friends and their families?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry that the hon. Member has not been able to secure a debate on this matter. He is sat next to the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, who is forever announcing opportunities to secure a debate. Perhaps if he would write to me in more detail about what he has done to secure a debate, I can advise and assist him further.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): On 18 May, the Leader of the House told me that she would again take up the matter of redundancy modification orders with the Department and chase up officials for me and perhaps suggest that the Minister meets me. I know that the Leader of the House can carry a great big sword. I do not agree with her on nuclear weapons, but will she use that great big sword and poke the Department, because I have had no response?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry to hear that the hon. Lady has not had a response. What I will do is contact the Department again on her behalf. In such cases where the Department is just not responding, we will also call in the permanent secretary, and I will do that on this occasion. I will follow up this afternoon, as I know the House is rising today, to urge them to contact the hon. Lady at least to give her an update on the matter.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): When my constituent lost power, Scottish Power transferred her on to a prepayment meter as an emergency fix. Three months later, her meter has not been repaired properly, causing major ramifications including her falsely being contacted by debt collectors. My constituent and my team have been in constant communication with ScottishPower, but the situation remains unresolved. Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Energy, Security and Net Zero to make a statement on holding large energy companies to account for poor customer service?

Penny Mordaunt: I am very sorry to hear about that case, and I will of course ensure that the Secretary of State has heard what the hon. Lady has said. Hopefully someone from ScottishPower’s media or public affairs team will be tuned in to the Chamber, and will have heard our dismay at those poor standards of customer service. We hope that the situation will be rectified.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Small businesses leasing retail space in railway stations have taken a financial hit as a result of industrial action. Train operating companies accept that refunds for rent on strike days should be made available but say that the decision is out of their hands, and that the Department for Transport is blocking the refunds, yet in response to a recent written question the DFT told me that the train operators should be dealing with this matter. Could the Leader of the House please confirm whether she expects a written ministerial statement today from the Transport Secretary clarifying the situation? If not, could she please write to him and ask him to intervene so that officials either unblock the refund requests or empower the train operating companies to take this forward themselves, so that small businesses stop getting stuck in the middle?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady has done us a service by raising this matter. I will get on to the relevant Department this afternoon and ask that it be clarified, which I am sure would be in the interests of all our constituents.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): I am incredibly proud that students from around the world choose to come to study in my city of Dundee at one of our two world-class universities; however, the newly published road map for a Scottish green industrial strategy pinpoints the failure of the UK Government to support international students as one of the key impediments to building Scotland's green economy, with some within the Tory party wanting to go further and limit which universities would be able to take in international students. It looks like the Tory party is more interested in deporting rather than developing and retaining talent, so can we have a statement from the UK Government ruling that out, with a commitment to doing more to offer a welcoming environment for students and graduates?

Penny Mordaunt: I would correct the hon. Gentleman. We have a very proud record of accepting international students and we do a huge amount of outreach work to attract international students here. We are one of the most popular places for them to study, and we are doing a huge amount through the British Council and other organisations to promote British education around the world. If he has specifics, I urge him to write to the relevant Departments. He can question the Education Secretary on 23 October and the Home Secretary on 18 September.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): The UN protocol on trafficking, which has been ratified by the UK, states that a victim of modern slavery does not need to have been physically transported during the course of their exploitation. The UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015, however, requires physical transportation for it to be a human trafficking offence. Under UK law, perpetrators of this heinous crime would receive a far more lenient sentence than if they were charged with trafficking. Can we have a debate in Government time to discuss bringing the UK's definition of trafficking in line with that of the UN?

Penny Mordaunt: I will certainly ensure that the Home Secretary and the Ministry of Justice have heard what the hon. Lady has raised. From my experience as a former Secretary of State for the Department for International Development, I can tell her that we do some incredible things around the world to combat not just crimes taking place in the UK or facilitated from the UK but crimes where the victims are in other parts of the world. What our National Crime Agency does,

not just for the UK but for many nations around the world, is incredibly impressive, and we should be very proud of it.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): With your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I say this? Every week I bring to business questions an issue from across the world on behalf of persecuted churchgoers with Christian beliefs, those with no beliefs or those with other beliefs, and every week the Leader of the House consistently, honestly and sincerely takes that matter to the relevant Minister, or secures me a meeting, letter or reply. That does not go unnoticed, and I thank her for it on behalf of people across the world who have no voice.

Earlier this week, ISIS boasted about the increased attacks against Christians in Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Kenya. The group claimed that militants had plundered Christian villages and massacred locals, and that the rate of attacks for the first half of 2023 was a 57% increase on the preceding six months. One of those examples was the Lhubiriha secondary school in Uganda, which this House discussed on 20 June; however, as the Leader of the House and others know, that is only the tip of the iceberg, with most attacks receiving little to no attention in the media. Will the Leader of the House join me and others in a statement condemning those attacks and expressing solidarity with the survivors?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his very kind words. With the exception of the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), whom I have excluded from my league table, the hon. Gentleman has attended the most business questions sessions of anyone in this House. He does us a great service, because he is always raising matters that should get airtime, and enables us all to send the message that we are focused on the plight of the people he mentions.

We are deeply concerned about the recent increase in attacks against Christians, particularly in Mozambique, the DRC, Nigeria and Kenya—the Foreign Office is following those situations very closely. These attacks are deplorable, and the UK will continue to use its influence in the UN, the Council of Europe and elsewhere to highlight these appalling human rights violations and galvanise action to protect freedom of religion and protect people who are being particularly persecuted, Christians being prime among them.

Tata Group Gigafactory Investment

11.26 am

The Minister for Industry and Economic Security (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am pleased to update the House about the significant investment announced by Tata Group just yesterday. The confirmation that Tata will be investing over £4 billion to build a new gigafactory—the largest in Europe, I believe—in the UK is a historic moment and a major vote of confidence in our automotive sector.

Across Government, we have worked closely with Tata for the past two years to help secure this crucial investment for the UK, and its decision to invest here is a testament to our strong partnership with Tata. Tata's announcement represents one of the largest investments we have ever seen in the automotive sector, and is part of a new wave of investments—as significant as those made in the 1980s—that are helping to turbocharge our transition to zero-emission vehicles. It will also be the group's first gigafactory outside India, directly creating up to 4,000 highly skilled new jobs, alongside thousands of further jobs in the wider supply chain for battery materials and critical raw materials.

Tata says that the battery gigafactory will produce high-quality, high-performance, sustainable battery cells and packs for a variety of applications within the mobility and energy sectors. As the anchor customer, the new gigafactory will supply Jaguar Land Rover's future battery electric models, including in the Range Rover, Defender, Discovery and Jaguar brands. That means we will soon see cars from JLR's iconic British brands manufactured in the UK, powered by batteries produced in the UK and developed using technology from research and development centres in the UK, before being exported to markets all over the world. Battery production at the new facility will commence in 2026, and we look forward to confirmation of the site's location once due diligence has been finalised. When operational, Tata expects it to be one of the largest buildings in the UK and plans to maximise its renewable energy mix, with an ambition for 100% clean power.

The investment is also an important reflection of the UK's position as a key location for European and global automotive manufacturing. With an initial output of 40 GW, the new factory confirmed yesterday will be one of the largest in Europe. As well as being a significant moment for the UK, this investment will play an important part in strengthening economic resilience across Europe in the highly integrated supply chain for the automotive sector and other key sectors. Using the Faraday Institution's estimates, it will provide almost half of the UK's required battery production by 2030, boosting the battery manufacturing capacity we need to support the electric vehicle industry in the long term.

The Government are committed to supporting the automotive sector and the electric vehicle supply chain to take full advantage of the move to zero-emission vehicles, and we are putting this commitment into action through the automotive transformation fund, the British industry supercharger and our strong programme of support for research and development. We are working alongside industry to unlock further private investment in our EV supply chain, and we have long-standing and comprehensive programmes of support for the automotive sector, including the ATF, the Advanced Propulsion Centre and, of course, the Faraday battery challenge.

This investment is an important milestone in enabling a UK-made transition to net zero. However, it does not stand in isolation. It builds on other announcements that have been secured with the support of Government, including Nissan and Envision plans to secure £1 billion to create an EV manufacturing hub in Sunderland, Ford committing a total of £380 million to make Halewood the first EV components site in Europe and Stellantis investing £100 million to transition Ellesmere Port to electric van manufacturing.

The transition to zero-emission vehicles gives us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape the future of manufacturing. Over 166,000 people are directly employed in the automotive sector, and I am delighted that yesterday's announcement means that thousands of new highly-skilled jobs will be created in the next few years just for this project alone. This fantastic news from Tata shows that the Government are getting behind business to unlock the barriers to growth and secure further investment, and it will be a real boost to the entire sector. I look forward to building on the momentum and continuing our strong relationship with the sector, so that we can move the UK forward in the race to net zero and support the delivery of the Prime Minister's priority to grow the economy. I commend this statement to the House.

11.31 am

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for advance sight of the statement.

Anyone who cares about and has knowledge of the automotive sector knows how important these battery factories are to the future of the UK. Without batteries being made here, it is unlikely there will be a long-term future for automotive production in this country, and for too long the UK has been far behind where we need to be. Therefore, everyone should welcome this news and breathe a huge sigh of relief that we finally have a positive development. In all the urgent questions, debates and statements we have had, this is what we have been calling for.

However, this relief should also come with the humility to appreciate that there is still a great deal to do. If this factory proceeds as planned, the UK will have 66 GWh of capacity by 2030, but at that point Germany would have over 300 GWh, Hungary over 200 GWh and China over 6,000 GWh. I therefore hope there is resolve in Government to make sure that this is just one of several major announcements of this kind. Of course, to secure this investment a substantial amount of public money has had to be spent. The Minister did not actually reference that. Can she provide some clarity on the media reports we have seen about how much exactly that will amount to?

This approach of using public investment to leverage in a much greater degree of private investment is the approach that we have advocated in Labour's green prosperity plan. Government Ministers have at times publicly disagreed with this proposal, but we always knew they were in talks that involved the same approach. I therefore put it to the Minister that it would be far better to set out that Government approach openly, transparently and honestly in order to attract more potential partners and be able to negotiate from a stronger position. Some might call this an industrial strategy, because the truth is that the UK was desperate for this announcement. If it had gone to another country,

[Jonathan Reynolds]

such as Spain, things would have looked very bleak indeed. That is why we are all so relieved, but that is not, if we are frank, the optimum negotiating position to find ourselves in.

Can I also ask the Minister about local content? Crucial to our future success is building up a domestic supply chain for these factories. Will the Government be specifying a minimum percentage of local content required by this factory in order to receive the generous subsidy that has been agreed? In addition, will the Government be encouraging the development of advanced battery chemistries in the UK to aid domestic job creation, but also to limit any risks from geopolitical events that have the potential to disrupt supply chains in future?

We also need to consider this announcement alongside the wider policy environment for automotive in the UK, specifically the rules of origin requirements under the trade and co-operation agreement and the Government's phase-out of internal combustion engines from 2030. Even with this welcome announcement, these timescales look incredibly tight. I do not believe anyone can seriously countenance a 10% tariff on vehicle exports to the EU, which would be the outcome of failing to meet the rules of origin requirements. Can the Minister update us on progress towards a deal?

Can the Minister also update the House on the Government's position on the 2030 phase-out timetable? Is she aware of concerns that maintaining that timescale without sufficient domestic production effectively means only Chinese vehicles stand any chance of meeting consumer demand in the short term? Surely we should be thinking holistically about the whole sector. It is not about a different level of ambition, just a query as to the best way to get there.

Finally, can I ask the Minister about industrial energy prices? So much of the transition to net zero requires more competitive industrial prices than the UK currently has. We know that has been and is a material factor in the deal, so can the Minister say whether a precedent has now been set that will have consequences for other sectors, such as steel, if deals are struck for their decarbonisation? In conclusion, I repeat my welcome of this announcement. I welcome the Government's conversion to Labour's way of thinking. I hope it is a sign of many more good things to come.

Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): I warmly welcome the Government's decision and the announcement by Tata, which highlights the UK's tech potential—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I beg the right hon. Gentleman's forgiveness. I was being distracted by another right hon. Gentleman, who ought to know better, and I therefore did not call the Minister to answer. I do apologise.

Ms Ghani: I think maybe we got a bit noisy as we were trying to fully digest the slightly delusional response of the Opposition Front Bencher, the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), to this statement. Our job as representatives of the automotive sector is to praise, protect and promote, not to play politics, especially with investment this substantial.

Tata's investment is so substantial. It is 40% of the gigawatts that we need, and fundamentally we need to have 100% by 2030. With Tata and Envision, we are two thirds of the way there. Obviously we want more, but we are not going to be complacent. We should not compare ourselves with the rest of Europe when their needs will be substantially different from ours, but let us take a moment to reflect on what is happening internationally. This is a global race to achieve net zero. Tata has decided to come here to the UK because it has faith in UK workers, UK technology and UK innovation. It has confidence in the UK supply chain, but fundamentally it has confidence in the UK Government's policy when it comes to advanced manufacturing and the automotive sector.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the automotive transformation fund, which is a £1 billion fund to support exactly this sort of initiative, but let us just reflect on the bonanza—I am not sure that is the right term—that the Opposition are offering. It is £28 billion in their plan, which is a lot of money for the taxpayer to front up for an un-costed plan that, as far as I am aware, is not endorsed by anyone in the advanced manufacturing sector and what they want to achieve. As we are getting close to our summer holiday, the £28 billion of un-costed promises that the Opposition are making are a bit like lines in the sand. We can look down at them, but the tide of reality will come in.

The Opposition's proposals mean nothing to industry or to job creation. They are created within the Westminster bubble. [Interruption.] If the Opposition do not believe me, they should listen to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the umbrella organisation for the automotive sector. It has talked about the substance in the UK supply chain, which will be a part of this initiative going forward. Unlike anywhere else in Europe, we have a fantastic supply chain with graphene, silicon carbide wafers—I am learning so much—power electronics, batteries and powertrains. It is a substantial boost to our supply chains in the UK. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am working not only on our critical minerals strategy but on our supply strategy, to make sure we are using UK innovation and UK goods across all our supply chains, and in particular in the automotive sector. I urge him to have some humility and to reverse, and to praise, promote and protect the sector, and definitely not to play politics with it; that is a very weak thing to do.

There are challenges dealing with the rules of origin. As the hon. Gentleman knows, not only the Prime Minister but the Secretary of State are in intensive talks with the European Union. This is an issue not just for the UK; it is also about cars made in the EU being transported into the UK. It is a two-way system. I urge everybody in the House who has contacts with European counterparts to ensure that they make it very clear that this will be damaging for European car manufacturers as well.

Let me turn to the zero-emission vehicle mandate. I have taken many a delegation to the Department for Transport, which is responsible for this bit of policy, and I am keen to back business. The consultation has concluded and results will come through, and we will continue to work with the DFT. My position has always been to back the automotive sector. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde does not seem to appreciate how substantial the investment is. We should be focused

on the £4 billion, the 4,000 jobs and the resilience in the supply chain—the 2,500 small firms across most of our constituencies that will be getting some support because of this fantastic confidence in the UK car and automotive sector, and fundamentally in UK policy when it comes to advanced manufacturing.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): And now I call Dominic Raab.

Dominic Raab: I warmly welcome the Government's announcement and Tata's decision, which highlights the tech potential of the UK. Does the Minister agree that our longer-term strategy, as I think she was setting out, is that we will not be able to engage in a bidding war on subsidies with the US, China and the EU, and that our comparative advantage will be shoring up the supply chain in the context of EV batteries, which means lithium deposits in the south-west and our emerging refinement capacity in Teesside?

Ms Ghani: I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and agree with every single point he made. He mentioned the lithium mine in Cornwall, which will eventually produce enough lithium for 500,000 electric cars and vehicles. There is such success for our supply chain because this Government have a strategy that is embedded in the real-world politics of dealing with the automotive sector, and our critical minerals refresh was exactly the support required for the lithium mine in Cornwall.

It is not just about the financial support; it is also about the ecosystem. Fundamentally, the organisation had faith in initiatives such as the Faraday battery challenge, the Advanced Propulsion Centre and the tech in the UK. All the components that are required are here in the UK, and we have been able to link that ecosystem and supply chain together, which gave Tata the confidence to come and build the biggest gigafactory in Europe here in the UK.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank the Minister for her statement and early sight of it. I agree that battery manufacturing capacity is important as part of our move towards EVs, away from petrol and diesel vehicles, and towards all our targets to achieve net zero. It would be remiss of me not to mention that a few years ago, as I am sure the Minister recalls, Dundee was given the "most EV visionary city in Europe" award by the World Electric Vehicle Association in Japan.

Let me turn to the statement itself. A £4 billion or so investment by Tata—that's good. Substantial investment by Envision in battery production in Sunderland, plus the other investments the Minister mentioned, are of course all welcome. Yet that is broadly a comparable sum—around £6 billion—to the investment in the EV charging network we have been promised by 2030. Does the Minister think we are on track to have the right balance between investment in the supply chain and battery production capacity, and in the EV charging network. That network is where most drivers intersect with the system and it is the largest cause of frustration when it does not work or breaks down.

Ms Ghani: I do not think it gets any more positive from the SNP on this point. I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman welcomed the £4 billion investment

and the more than 4,000 jobs, and the confidence we have in the advanced manufacturing sector in the UK; that was such a positive response to what this Government have been able to achieve. I was not aware of the Dundee point, but I will go away and look it up. So many people have been responsible for getting this project over the line and so many have been campaigning for gigafactories. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) has been campaigning for gigafactories for longer than I have been in Parliament, so huge thanks go to him and to everyone else who helped to get this project over the line.

On charging points, as the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) said in last week's debate on the automotive sector, ChargeUK has committed to investing more than £6 billion in the development and operation of charging infrastructure before 2030. We heard in that debate that some colleagues felt the investment in their constituencies was not substantial enough. We need to make sure that as demand for EV vehicles grows—there has been much more demand and many more sales recently—the charging infrastructure stands up to that. As the Minister responsible for the automotive sector, I know we are doing everything we can to fulfil our part of the bargain, as it were, but we need to make sure that charging infrastructure is rolled out as fast as it can be. Substantial targets are being met and the Transport Minister is keen to take up constituency cases to make sure that the roll-out is fast as it can be.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am absolutely delighted by this announcement. A number of my constituents work in the Vauxhall van factory in Luton, which makes a fantastic Vivaro van that we want to get electrified. Will the Minister say a little more about how we complete the final piece of the picture so that every car plant in the UK is reassured that there will be UK-made batteries? Yesterday's announcement was fantastic, but one or two of us are concerned about that last piece.

Ms Ghani: I hope to get an invitation to visit that plant and my hon. Friend's constituency, and I will of course do my best to promote Vauxhall vans. What is really exciting about this initiative is that it is about producing batteries not just for JLR but for the whole market, which is crucial. With the Tata and Envision gigafactories, we are two thirds of the way to getting to the 100 GW that the Faraday challenge believes we need. We are not complacent and are still going to do everything we can to secure further investment and seek further growth in this area, but for the moment we need to accept that this gigafactory could have gone anywhere in Europe, and there were huge talks about where it was going to be, but Tata had confidence in the UK and decided to come home to us.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I say, Madam Deputy Speaker, what a pleasure it is to see you back in the Chair on a regular basis? I wish you and everybody else who works in Parliament a very good recess when it comes.

This is a very welcome announcement. Tata is a good company and this is a big day and a big announcement. Of course, this investment should have been in Huddersfield

[Mr Barry Sheerman]

—I would say that, wouldn't I?—because we have a wonderful engineering skillset. I do not want to be a downer, but I warn the Minister of this: by the time building work on the canal system was finished, everybody had lost their shirt on their investment because the railways came unexpectedly and all the investment was wiped out. I have recently visited JCB, which has developed hydrogen-powered vehicles; will the Minister make sure that the Government focus equally on hydrogen? Many of us believe that, rather like the railways and the canals, hydrogen will come almost out of the blue and be the major, much more sustainable, future mode of transport.

Ms Ghani: The hon. Member is absolutely right that Huddersfield is a great place. We are not complacent: if the right opportunity, investment and partnership is put forward, we will of course consider that. We want to make sure that we continue to grow our gigafactory capacity. I knew that the hon. Member was going to touch on hydrogen, which he talks about often. The work we are doing with the ATF is not just about electric vehicles but about how we adopt all new functioning technologies to get to the first stage of zero emissions, and then to the next stage and so on. There are opportunities for hydrogen projects to come forward. Just a few weeks ago I visited a major construction project where not only the vehicles on site building and developing the port and the infrastructure were going to be hydrogen, but the vehicles moving on and off the site were to be well. Hydrogen is very much in our sights too.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I warmly welcome this announcement. Does my hon. Friend agree that it shows this Government's commitment to real and tangible green investment in the crucial automotive industry, in its supply chains and in many connected businesses throughout the UK, including the environmentally exemplary, forward-thinking transport logistics company in my constituency, Brit European?

Ms Ghani: Brit European sounds like one of the firms I need to meet. No doubt my hon. Friend will invite me to visit, and I look forward to meeting the firm with her. She is absolutely right: this is a huge vote of confidence in our ability to adopt new technologies to achieve net zero. It is not just about finding and securing new sources of critical minerals; we are at the leading edge of battery recycling too. The UK Battery Industrialisation Centre will help us to stay at the forefront of recycling.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): My constituents are desperate to embrace the transition to electric vehicles, whether cars, vans or buses, but electric cars remain far too expensive, and the charging infrastructure barely exists—and where it does exist, it is not reliable. Although investment is welcome, we need a consistent strategy. If the Government are serious about reaching net zero, I urge the Minister to look again at reintroducing incentives to take up electric vehicles. Will she consider giving local authorities a statutory responsibility to roll out, with pandemic-style urgency, the EV charging infrastructure that we so desperately need?

Ms Ghani: When the council in my constituency was Conservative-led, it had a substantial charging point infrastructure roll-out plan, which it had secured itself. When a council is ambitious, it is amazing how much work can be done. We know that sales of electric vehicles are up, as are EV exports and manufacturing, and prices will come down as more come on the market. I am slightly anxious about the sort of incentives the hon. Lady is asking for, if it means just another extra cost to the average taxpayer. We have really good charging infrastructure and fantastic supply chains. As this investment increases confidence in our supply chains, manufacturing will continue to increase and the cars will become even more attractive. My constituents, like hers, want to leave a leaner and greener footprint on the Earth.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): This is fantastic news for the UK economy, with thousands of skilled jobs and investment in the transition to a lower carbon future. Does my hon. Friend agree that, while Labour continues its rather odd tribute act to new Labour and the likes of Lord Prescott, who famously had two Jags, it is the Conservatives who are delivering inward investment in our country and the UK car industry that will deliver much more?

Ms Ghani: I have learned that it is not a good use of one's time to focus on what the Opposition are offering, because they U-turn so quickly; by the time one has closed the book they have just published, they have changed their mind. Let us not fret about that.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Investment in the automotive sector is on a fantastic trajectory, with not just this commitment but those from Stellantis, Ford, Envision and Nissan. That is because we have a really stellar agenda on how we create and adopt new technology to ensure that advanced manufacturing in the UK competes internationally, as we did with steel, including by helping with high energy costs, which are now coming down. We work hand in glove with the industry. We do not sit around in a Westminster bubble, creating new budgets that are completely uncoded and endorsed by no one in the sector. Yesterday's and today's news is fantastic for the automotive sector.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I too welcome the announcement—I genuinely do—but we are miles behind European competitors. Some of that is Brexit-related, but mainly it is due to the lack of an industrial strategy, which is even more important in the net zero-related sectors. This Government are miles behind right across the EV sector; other countries are ramping up incentives, but this Government are slashing them. As a result, sales are plateauing. The charging network outside London is a postcode lottery, with some places a charging desert. Scotland had a strategy from day one. That is why we have twice as many rapid chargers per head than even London. When will the Government treat this issue with appropriate urgency?

Ms Ghani: I am afraid the hon. Gentleman is just wrong. First, car sales are up, car manufacturing is up, and car exports even into Europe are up. I am not sure what his view is. He welcomes the £4 billion investment to create the largest gigafactory in Europe, but just cannot bring himself to dwell on the good news it

brings to so many of his businesses that will, no doubt, be involved in the supply chain helping us to deliver the cars that will now have UK-made batteries.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): Like so many, I welcome this statement. It provides an incredible, positive message for the UK and for the way we are attracting businesses of the right sort. However, we must remember that there is an existing motor supply chain and it will be taking on many challenges as the industry moves across from what we have now into the electric market. One of the suppliers in that market space is Gestamp in Newton Aycliffe. It supplies motor manufacturers all over the world and is a tremendous company. The Minister has been asking for invitations to visit other businesses, so I invite her to come and see Gestamp and to have a good conversation about the way the supply chain is being impacted by these tremendous investments.

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend is such a champion of the businesses in his constituency. May I provide him with some confidence? Securing this investment is about providing assurances to everyone in the supply chain that there is now a bigger game for them to play—there will be far more production, sales and, obviously, work for them to do. My hon. Friend has invited me previously; it is an outstanding engagement and I look forward to visiting him shortly. I chair the Automotive Council so I meet a lot of small and medium-sized enterprises, but if I have not already met the firm he mentions, I suggest he gives my private office a little nudge and I will make sure I correspond with the firm shortly.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): By 2025, Germany is set to have 10 times more battery capacity than the UK, while the US is set to have 30 times more capacity. I welcome yesterday's announcement of Tata Group's investment in a UK gigafactory, but will the Minister confirm exactly how the Government plan to ensure that this will be just the first, not the last, such announcement?

Ms Ghani: The hon. Gentleman has done his homework, but the most important point he needs to remember is that to meet our demand in the UK we need 100 GW. That is not a decision we have taken; it is a piece of work done by the Faraday Institution. Comparing us with the USA or Germany does not really work well, because we are trying to deal with the manufacturing that we have in the UK. So, we need 100 GW; this announcement provides 40 GW, and we have 12 GW with Envision and Nissan, which may go up to 38 GW if they wish to expand. Potentially we are two thirds of the way there, but we do not want to be complacent. When drawing international comparisons, we have to ask how many of the countries—whether the USA or Germany—are two thirds of the way to meeting their battery needs. This is of course not the first or the second step, because we have Nissan already with Envision, but yesterday's announcement is substantial and we will of course continue to go forward. It shows huge confidence in the UK supply chain and will no doubt attract further investment.

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): This is absolutely fantastic news for the UK. Much of the supply chain in east Lancashire can grow further and faster with

Government commercialisation and focused investment and support. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government are committed to making the UK a leading player in the whole of the EV battery space and that they will work with businesses such as Emerson and Renwick in Hyndburn and Haslingden to support growth in the supply chain?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend is a true champion of her constituency and all the firms within it. I am keen catch up with her now we know we have this fantastic deal and to see what more we can do for the many firms in her constituency. We want to make sure that everybody in the supply chain can be involved in this programme of work as it comes through. We have a number of initiatives, whether it is the automotive transformation fund or the Faraday challenge, to ensure that we are doing everything we can to adopt the new set of technology rules and de-risk any new technology that firms have in place. At the moment we think that that will boost 2,500 small firms, but of course if we can involve any more we will do that, and I look forward to sitting down with my hon. Friend and seeing what more we can do for her constituents.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Of course this new gigafactory announcement is very welcome, but it has taken time. How will it impact the industrial energy price? The Minister has not answered that question and we know that that price is a barrier to decarbonisation and that addressing it will ensure the transition to net zero and lower energy bills, which needs to be prioritised across all sectors and industries in our transition.

Ms Ghani: As a result of Putin's invasion of Ukraine and high energy prices, we introduced substantial programmes to give energy-intensive firms the support that they needed. The next phase of that is the energy supercharger, which—as the hon. Lady will know—the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero has been talking about. We know that energy prices will fall in the near future, and that there will be a change in the mix of energy costs.

Tata came to the UK not only because it is, obviously, the best place in which to build a gigafactory and has a fantastic skillset, but because we could offer competitive energy prices. We have had conversations about that with a number of firms and investors. When energy prices were high and we were dealing with energy-intensive industries, we made sure that we provided the necessary support to protect those firms and their employees.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I thank the Minister for her statement, and welcome Tata's investment. The Adam Smith Institute has said that securing sustainable foreign direct investment is fantastic, but that the UK should also be introducing supply-side reforms so that we can continue to champion carbon reduction on a global scale. In the light of that, what steps are Ministers taking to introduce supply-side reforms?

Ms Ghani: I am working with most industry representatives to establish what we can do about the supply side, not just through reforms but by giving them the assurance, accessibility and resilience that they need to get their products into the country and continue

[Ms Ghani]

manufacturing, whether in the chemical or the aviation sector. We are working closely with industry, and I hope to present a supply-side input strategy by the autumn.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): I have pressed the Minister many times for support to enable good, skilled jobs in the automotive sector and supply chains to be retained in the UK, including those at Vauxhall in my constituency, to which she is obviously welcome to pay a visit at any time. May I now press her to tell us how many public money or subsidy arrangements have been entered into by the Government to support Tata's welcome choice of the UK for its gigafactory? If she is coy about answering that question, may I also ask how much of the £1 billion automotive transformation fund is left to support existing businesses such as Stellantis, also in Luton South?

Ms Ghani: I know that a visit to Luton South is outstanding, and I hope that we can secure a date soon. The hon. Lady has asked a very good and clever question. As she has said, the ATF amounts to £1 billion, and in due course, with due diligence, the commitments from Tata will be made public. However, the numbers on which we should focus are these. Tata is investing £4.5 billion to build Europe's largest gigafactory, which is guaranteed to create more than 4,000 jobs and support, potentially, 2,500 firms in the supply chain. Those are the numbers that we should be proud of today, having secured such a stellar investment in a sector that all of us in the Chamber—because we are here on a Thursday afternoon—clearly wish to protect and promote. We won this investment, over any other European country. Tata could have gone anywhere, but it came here because it had confidence in our workers, our companies and our ecosystem.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for making such a positive statement. Everyone was enthralled by the announcement that Tata is to invest £4 billion in an electric car battery manufacturing site in Somerset, which is wonderful news for commerce and jobs in the UK, not to mention our contributions to the commitment made at COP26 and COP27, but can the Minister tell us whether sites outside England will be considered in the future? It is said that four battery factories are needed. Has the Minister considered, or is she considering, Northern Ireland as one of those locations, with the aim of boosting commerce in all regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? I am committed to that aim, and I know that the Minister is. It is good to know that we can all gain advantage from this.

Ms Ghani: It is great that we have a major commitment to one of the biggest gigafactories in Europe. That will generate even more investment and more interest in building gigafactories in the UK. We will, of course, consider all proposals for sites that are brought forward by commercial partners who see value in building gigafactories in the UK. This commitment shores up what we have, takes us towards where we need to be in 2030, and will help us meet our need for batteries, but it will also attract new investment. This is a massive vote of confidence in the UK economy and the UK's policies on the automotive sector.

May I wish everyone a wonderful summer break, and thank all staff, especially the staff in the Tea Room, who enable us to get through our very long days?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Indeed. I thank the Minister on behalf of everybody who works in this building. I thank her for taking questions.

Backbench Business

Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We come to the moment we have all been waiting for: the last piece of business before the summer recess. It is the Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate. For just a moment, we pause and remember our late and very greatly missed honourable Friend.

A great many people want to speak this afternoon. There is plenty of time, but if everyone keeps their contributions under 10 minutes, we will manage without a formal time limit, which will make for a much more pleasant and easily flowing debate. It will also be fair. Everybody will get a decent crack of the whip—oh, I do not mean “the Whip”; let me be more precise: everyone will get the chance to speak for the same amount of time. To move the motion, I call the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, Mr Ian Mearns.

12.6 pm

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

As Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to open this debate, and to commemorate the memory of our lost friend, Sir David Amess. I have had the privilege of holding my role as Chair since 2015, with the support of colleagues from both sides of the House. These debates offer me and other Members from across the House a great opportunity that the parliamentary timetable might not otherwise allow to raise issues from the constituency. I express my gratitude to those Members who had the fortitude to resist the temptation to attend one of the three by-elections, and who are here on the day of a national rail strike—and, of course, the final day before the summer recess. As I say, this is an opportunity to raise a whole range of issues, and with your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will do that.

Last month marked the sixth anniversary of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. I am certain that colleagues will remember that night with great sadness, and I know that many of them share my desire to see lessons learned from that tragic evening, and to ensure that constituents in buildings with similar cladding and fire safety issues are protected from physical risks and financial burden. In the six years that have passed, a series of Ministers have made bold statements about protecting leaseholders from the costs that those leaseholders might incur in protecting themselves. Even today, hundreds of my constituents, and equal numbers of constituents in nearly every urban constituency, are living in limbo. Those affected are predominantly in properties that are under 18 metres high, which the Government deem not to require surveys, though mortgage companies, conveyancers and insurance companies most certainly do. Constituents in defective buildings are suffering from a cocktail of potential dangers, and they have no funding or recourse to remedy, and no ability to pay for the works required, to move, or to move on with their life. There is complete imbalance between the power of the freeholder and that of the leaseholder and tenant. The Government continue to make positive statements, but I am afraid that they continue to let down many hundreds of my constituents.

On a more positive note, I have been delighted to learn of the continuation of funding for the next 12 months for the special school eye care service; small pilots of that service are running across the country. I was delighted to visit the service in action at the excellent Gibside School in my Gateshead constituency. I urge the Government to commit to a national roll-out of the service in the long term. It is a service for visually impaired children with special educational needs and disabilities, for whom it is difficult at the best of times to get accurate eye tests and spectacles.

I am also delighted to report to the House that the state-of-the-art conference facility earmarked for a site in the heart of Gateshead—close to the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, the Sage Gateshead, which is our regional music centre, and of course the Gateshead Millennium bridge—will begin construction in the autumn. I hope that, over the course of the next 10 years, many Members will have the opportunity to see Gateshead in all its glory at this brand-new facility.

I want to take a moment to recognise the groundbreaking district heating system developed by Gateshead Council in my constituency. The system supplies many households and businesses in the centre of Gateshead and is continually expanding. The system operates using natural gas, but there are plans in the near future to convert the plant to use the heat of mine water, using the north-east’s proud industrial heritage to generate clean energy for the people of Gateshead. As we continue to deal with the climate crisis, I am sure that all Members will commend Gateshead Council’s cutting-edge investment in clean power and energy efficiency.

I am afraid that that marks the end of the more upbeat chapter of my speech. I have long campaigned against the council tax system, which I believe has been unfit for purpose from the outset. We all breathed a sigh of relief when we got rid of the poll tax, but my constituency has among the highest council tax rates in the country despite featuring highly on every single measure of poverty and need.

The system hands a huge financial advantage to authorities whose properties are above band D on average. By their very nature such authorities are often in the more affluent areas of the country. Conversely, areas such as Gateshead have a council tax base made up almost exclusively of band A and band B properties. Coupled with the removal of the majority of the revenue support grant, Gateshead Council has had to hike council tax rates to fill some of the gap.

I want to draw this House’s attention to local government finances more broadly. Gateshead Council’s annual budget has been almost halved in real terms since 2010, hugely reducing the council’s ability to maintain vital and good-quality public services. That is happening despite a significant hike in demand for adult social care and children’s social services. This summer, two of the six public leisure centres in Gateshead will close as the council battles with a huge hole in its budget in the face of rising costs and need.

The areas of highest deprivation and poverty are seeing council tax rates skyrocket while services plummet. We in Gateshead are watching the gap between wealthy and less wealthy areas widen rapidly. We are paying far more for services that are a mere shadow of their former selves, while people in many areas of the south-east pay much less for far more. No Government should be

[*Ian Mearns*]

taking decisions that make the lives of ordinary people more arduous, difficult and poverty stricken. This cannot be allowed to continue.

Gateshead has a proud track record of offering safe haven for those seeking protection from some of the worst regimes and war-torn areas around the world. I regularly meet families who have settled in Gateshead and now call it home, but I also meet many families and individuals who are the opposite of settled. Many of them have been in the United Kingdom for years. Many are still waiting for decisions on their applications. Many have skills and qualities that our communities and our economy urgently require.

The latest figures from the Home Office demonstrate the disgraceful scale of the problem. As of 31 March this year, 172,000 asylum applications were awaiting their first decision, and 128,000 have been ongoing for more than 12 months. It is desperately worrying that the number of people waiting for a decision has grown exponentially from 16,000 in 2016 to 133,000 in 2023. The Government must get a grip on this crisis as a matter of urgency, yet they appear to be using the figures to justify an incredibly troubling policy direction. The majority of those people have fled some of the worst tragedies in our world, and our communities are better for having them.

Finally, let me turn to a couple of more topical issues. Just this week, following a BBC investigation, it has been revealed that more than 100 current or former workers for the McDonald's fast food chain, many of them vulnerable young people, have complained of 78 instances of alleged sexual harassment, 31 relating to sexual assault, 18 of racism and six of homophobia. That is a very poor employment record for any employer. No one should go to work having to run the gauntlet of sexual assault or harassment, or discrimination on the grounds of their race, gender or sexuality. I declare an interest, because these allegations were brought to light following tireless campaign work by the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, whose parliamentary group I chair.

McDonald's has allowed sexual assault, bullying, harassment and racism to happen on its watch, but while all that has been happening on its premises, it has steadfastly ensured that one kind of activity certainly is not allowed—trade union activity. Workers are prevented from getting together to protect themselves from some of the worst excesses of an employer that has clearly been turning a blind eye to all sorts of nastiness on its premises.

It is necessary, but not enough, to look at whether any laws or guidance have been breached here. As the TUC general secretary, Paul Nowak, has said:

“All the guidelines—and indeed laws—in the world count for little if workers don't have access to strong, independent unions.”

This is not just a matter of a toxic culture developing inside one company, McDonald's. This kind of abuse results from power differentials arising from a situation where vulnerable young workers, often on zero-hours contracts, are desperate for shifts and therefore dependent on the largesse of their managers. It is critical that the next Labour Government act to ban the use of zero-hours contracts and ensure that trade unions have a statutory right of access to workplaces in order to communicate to workers and free them from the anti-union scare-mongering of their employers.

Finally, noting my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as chair of the RMT's parliamentary group, I want to say that our public transport network has been dismantled and decimated by the patchwork quilt of private operating companies running trains and buses for shareholder profit, not for passenger service. If, as a country and a Government, we are remotely serious about tackling climate change and lethally poor air quality in some places, we must urgently address the inadequate and, for too many communities, non-existent public transport network.

The most recent decision to close almost all ticket offices across the country shows once again that this Government are intent on running our vital infrastructure simply as a profit-making entity. Although it is shrouded in the pretence of offering greater accessibility to staff, it is clear to me and many of my constituents that it is nothing more than a naked attempt to cut costs, sack hard-working staff, reduce access for the frail, disabled and vulnerable, and bolster profits. Not only will it have a negative impact across the network; it will have an exclusionary impact on those who are not able to use smartphones or to see or properly access automatic ticket machines, or who have significant disabilities and accessibility issues.

Good quality, affordable and reliable public transport is the backbone of any modern and high-performing economy, but for too many years we have seen that vital public infrastructure chopped up and sold off, handed to companies with neither any experience nor any interest in operating for the public or economic good of the country, which carve out profits at the expense of their staff, their customers and the local and regional economy, then hand back the reins when they have squeezed out every last drop of profit. That is why Network Rail, London North Eastern Railway, Northern and TransPennine Express are all now in public ownership.

We have seen cuts to services, cuts to staff, and cuts to maintenance, yet huge increases in prices, cancellations and delays, with taxpayers—many of whom have no access to any of these services—footing the bill for the Government's largesse. We must put an end to this merry-go-round and return to running our public transport in the public interest.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), and to all Members? I have not missed a Sir David Amess Adjournment debate in 13 years. I am sorry, but I am going to have to miss this one because I have an event to go to back home. It is the 50th anniversary of the women who served in the Ulster Defence Regiment; I am one of their guests, and I wish to be there to support them. I wish the hon. Member for Gateshead, you, Madam Deputy Speaker, Mr Speaker, all the Deputy Speakers and every Member here—friends all—a very good recess. May the Lord bless you for the summer that comes ahead and all you do.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I hand back to the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, I hardly need point out that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), in his inimitable way, has not missed the debate. He has managed to put in his tuppence-worth, as ever, in a way that is procedurally

acceptable, because the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) gave way to him, which is perfectly proper. The whole House appreciates his good wishes.

Ian Mearns: In his inimitable way, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has secured, through his kind words, his season ticket for the Backbench Business Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker, may I thank you and Members across the House for the indulgence of allowing me to lead this debate? I will get a chance to reply at the end, and I will leave my best wishes for the summer until then.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

12.21 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): David Amess and I had a common interest in the all-party parliamentary fire safety and rescue group, which is one of the groups of which I am an officer. That is relevant to the debate we had yesterday, when the House sort of came to a conclusion on the Standards Committee's rules on all-party groups, but that is for another day, when it has had a chance to review what is going on.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) for his work with me on the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill Committee a long time ago, for nearly two years, and for the exemplary way in which he and his Committee run the Backbench Business Committee. All who come to make applications are grateful for the serious consideration given by members of that Committee and the way they manage to schedule so many debates that are of interest to our constituents and important to the nation, and that give MPs the chance to say what they want to say.

I am afraid that I cannot be here for the winding-up speeches at 5 o'clock, because today is the day of St Margaret of Antioch, the patron saint of St Margaret's church, Westminster, across the road from here. As parliamentary warden, I will be at that service.

I want the Minister to get others together and have a meeting with me and representatives of the former sergeant Gurpal Virdi, an excellent police officer. In my previous constituency, I represented the family of Stephen Lawrence after he had been attacked. One police officer in that investigation did well; many others did not. There was a similar attack—not a fatal one—on a foreign student in Ealing. Gurpal Virdi left his police station, found two of the suspects, found the attack weapon and went to see the family. Later on, he asked whether the attack had been recorded as potentially racist. When he came back from holiday, his home was turned over by a terrorist search squad because he was thought to have sent a message to himself saying, "You're not wanted here. National Front." He is Sikh, and that message was also received by other minority ethnic officers.

There is no need to take too many notes, because most of this is recorded in a book he has published called "Behind the Blue Line". I contributed one of the forewords, and the other one was contributed by Dr Richard Stone, the Jewish human rights doctor who was one of the advisers on Macpherson's Stephen Lawrence inquiry. Both Richard Stone and I knew what we were writing about, and we know Gurpal Virdi.

Gurpal Virdi managed to get out of the difficulties that some people in the police were putting on him. He was later commended by Bernard Hogan-Howe when

deputy commissioner. One of his tasks in the police was working in the Battersea police station when one of the sergeants was Cressida Dick. People who have been at the top of the Metropolitan Police Service have known about him and his case for a long time.

In 2014, I wrote to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Home Secretary explaining why the proposed prosecution of Gurpal Virdi for what was originally described as indecently assaulting someone under the age of 16 in a police van in 1986 was an impossible prosecution and should not go ahead. The prosecution did go ahead, and after a week and a half's trial in Southwark Crown court, ending on 31 July 2015, the jury took about 50 minutes to come back to court with their conclusion. If we allow them 10 minutes to get back to the jury room, five minutes to go to the rest room, five minutes to have a discussion and 10 minutes to get back to the court, we can see how long it took them to decide that the case was not a proper one to have been brought and to establish his innocence.

I then asked whether the police could review how the prosecution happened. I also asked the Crown Prosecution Service and the Attorney General how it happened. What is now the Independent Office for Police Conduct put to the Metropolitan police the question of whether it had acted properly. The Metropolitan police referred that to its directorate of professional standards. Most cases of historical sex abuse were investigated by the Sapphire group, but it was not interested in this; it had passed it to the directorate of professional standards, who were the people who actually did the investigation. When the IOPC or whatever it was called in those days referred it to them, the directorate of professional standards came to the conclusion, "There's nothing wrong here."

I am going to spell out briefly some of the things that were wrong. First, the Metropolitan police and the CPS held a press briefing announcing that Gurpal Virdi had assaulted somebody under the age of 16. They had known from the day after they started investigating that the complainant was over 16. They accused Gurpal Virdi of using a collapsible police baton up the bottom of this young man, when there was another police officer in the back of the van and another in the front. They have never found the driver and the person they believe was the other person in the van denied there was an assault. Secondly, they said the arrest was made in a different place from where the complainant said it happened. Thirdly, they said it was a different kind of police van. Fourthly, they said there was no serious assault and, most importantly, that there was no collapsible police truncheon or baton. That is not a big surprise, because the alleged events were in 1986 and collapsible police batons were issued in 1995, years later. This case was supervised by a gold group at Scotland Yard—so we are talking about senior officers—with the CPS. How did they manage not to notice that the case was impossible?

I could go on at greater length, but I make this point, through the Minister, to those responsible. When we have this meeting, I would like them to explain how the prosecution managed to avoid paying any attention to the only documentary evidence that was left. Gurpal Virdi's notebooks had been taken by the police and destroyed. What was available was a conviction notice in the Lambeth East juvenile court from spring 1987 about the complainant. He had been arrested a month

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before by an officer with Gurpal Virdi. The complainant never mentioned that arrest, which definitely did take place. He had made up nonsense about the time he was arrested in the autumn of 1986, but there was no evidence whatsoever that Gurpal Virdi was involved. Other officers were named—the officer in charge is named, but he made no statement. When asked, he said, “I know nothing about it.” If the complainant thought that he had been mistreated by Gurpal Virdi in the autumn of 1986, one would expect that he would have mentioned that at the time of his arrest, which certainly did happen, in the spring of 1987. He did not mention it at all. The investigating officers did not even interview the other police officer who was known to have been part of that arrest. That is the level of either incompetence or targeting of a good police officer that we are seeing here.

I want the police, the IOPC, the CPS and Ministers to get together in a meeting, preferably with me, Gurpal Virdi and his lawyer, Matt Foot of Birnberg Peirce, to go through what needs to be established, so that people can have confidence in the Metropolitan police in the future. If they decline, that confidence is not going to return. We have all heard Sir Mark Rowley speaking recently about historical things that he is going to put right and about the officers he says he does not want to keep in his force.

Many of those involved in what I have been talking about will have retired. I wish them no ill, but I want to know that no other person like Gurpal Virdi—one of the best people I have known—can be subjected to something like the earlier incident with the racist material he did not produce or be put through a totally bogus charge after they have retired. All the evidence available showed that he was not involved, and that the crime did not happen and could not have happened. I am not satisfied and I will not be. Therefore, if I have to come back this time next year for another Adjournment debate, I will, but I will name names. I will name the names of every officer involved, everyone involved in the Crime Prosecution Service and the others. I would prefer not to do so; I would prefer to get this sorted out. I believe that, if the commissioner agreed with the IOPC and the CPS, they could get two people to look together at what was available and what happened. They could then produce a report. The Metropolitan police could then say that they had learned the lessons and, if they felt like it, apologise to Gurpal Virdi for the third time.

12.30 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak once again in the aptly named Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate. Although we sat on opposite sides of the House, the one thing that he and I had in common was our fierce passion for the communities that we represented. Few fought harder for their constituents than Sir David and the summer Adjournment debate was always the pinnacle of that.

I wish to open today by talking about my own little corner of the world and the fabulous things that are happening in Swansea East. I have spoken a lot about the Everyone Deserves project, which provides lunch clubs, hampers and cooked meals to families across the constituency who might otherwise go without during

the school holidays and festive times. Thanks to a host of generous donations and the support of colleagues, both here and in the Senedd, I was delighted last year to be able to extend the provision to communities in Neath, Aberavon and Merthyr Tydfil. I am as delighted to be able to do the same during the upcoming summer break.

With households across the area feeling the pinch, demand is higher than ever, but, throughout the holidays, Everyone Deserves will be providing lunch for some fantastic free activities to ease the burden for parents who are struggling with the extra costs that school holidays incur. I thought that, as we head into the summer recess, it would be a perfect opportunity to thank everybody who has played a part in making Everyone Deserves the success that it is. There are the companies that readily donate funds and resources every time I pick up the phone and ask—I apologise to anyone I forget: Budget Carpets, Hygrove Homes, Low Cost Vans, Coastal Housing, Greggs, Warburtons, Morrisons, the solicitors Peter Lynn and Partners, Morganstone, JCR Wealth, ADS Ltd, Dawsons and AB Glass; the wholesalers, Bidfood and Castell Howell, who go out of their way not just to process and deliver our initial orders, but to accommodate my ever changing last-minute requests; the Swans, the Ospreys, the *Evening Post*, Rob Stewart and Swansea City Council, which we could not do this without. I thank, too, Huw Cooze from Visions Creative for volunteering his time to design our posters and advertising, and my friend since childhood, the hugely talented Mal Pope, for recording his music and donating the proceeds from his album sales to the campaign.

I also wish to thank my political partners who help to spread the support from Everyone Deserves to more and more people across our little part of south Wales—Julie James MS for Swansea West, Jeremy Miles MS for Neath, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock)—can someone please tell him that I said something nice about him, so I do not have to do it again?—and my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones), about whom I am always happy to say nice things.

Then there is my team, who spend not just their working hours, but their own time chasing orders, organising deliveries, packing hampers, and doing whatever they can to make sure that no one goes without. So I say thank you from my heart to Emma, David, Ellie, Sarah, Tom, and Jo. Finally, I thank my long-suffering husband, David, who has no choice but to get involved. There are so many people who make Everyone Deserves happen, so to all those I have mentioned, and to all those I may have forgotten, thank you.

We were almost the best team in Wales last year, but might have been piped to the post by the Welsh football team who got to the World Cup for the first time in 64 years. They showed great generosity by letting the other teams win, but I hope that they know how proud we are of them as a nation, and to see them on the world stage was fantastic. I can only echo the words of another supporter of Everyone Deserves, Michael Sheen, who in his rousing speech, before the boys left for the tournament, told them:

“Every man, woman and child stands with you.”

I take this opportunity to once again congratulate all the boys, particularly our captain and national hero Gareth Bale, who retired from international football at

the end of that season. Gareth very generously supports Everyone Deserves and I was delighted to see him collect his MBE recently, as he is someone who truly deserves to be recognised for everything he has done. I was quite emotional when I saw his name on the last Queen's honours list.

I was equally emotional when I saw in the first King's honours list the name of another person with whom I work closely and who I am honoured to call a friend: menopause warrior and all-round superwoman Davina McCall. Davina has led from the front and used her platform, like so many others, to break down the barriers and shatter the stigma that has surrounded the menopause for so long. I have no doubt that she would join me in championing those who do not have the platform that we do, but who have campaigned tirelessly and passionately to change the narrative and ensure that all women have fair and equal access to the support that they need, be that medical support and treatment, support in the workplace or holistic lifestyle support.

Over the last year, we have seen some real progress and that is largely thanks to all those who are campaigning so vehemently at grassroots level. Awareness is being raised. We now have a prepayment certificate available to reduce the cost of hormone replacement therapy, and more and more women are feeling supported by their clinicians, employers, partners and society more widely. We are certainly not there yet; we will not be until every woman is able to easily access the treatment she chooses and able to stay in work and seek promotion, if she wants to.

We should celebrate the progress that we have made, and I hope to stand here at next year's summer Adjournment debate welcoming even more progress. But for now, I wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, colleagues across the House and everyone who makes this place work a very happy and healthy summer break.

12.37 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). I would never accuse her of Godwottery, because she is a plain speaker. Indeed, one of the things I enjoyed in her speech was her mention of Gareth Bale, who was born to play for Tottenham Hotspur.

I am particularly pleased to participate in the debate because we well remember Sir David Amess, who would be sitting not too far away from me here and rattle through 27 or 28 different individual cases. I do not intend to try to emulate him in that.

I congratulate my friends on Harrow Council—the new Conservative-led council—who have got to grips with the Labour overspending and disastrous services that have gone on for more than 13 years. The administration has had to get to grips with providing decent services and dealing with a budget that was not properly constructed.

In local government, ridiculous bureaucratic situations can arise, and I will mention one case. One of my erstwhile constituents has been transferred from Harrow Council to Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. Under current legislation, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council does not have to take up the case of this vulnerable individual, so we are left with the ludicrous position where Harrow Council is trying to provide care and fund someone who is literally 100 miles away. That, to me, is something that we need to consider and to fix.

Let me move on to the key issue of the day: the ridiculous decision by the Mayor of London to expand the ultra-low emission zone to outer London. The judicial review took place on 4 July. The Mayor is currently doing everything he can to distract everyone from the disastrous expansion. We are waiting for the result of that review and the judge in the case has agreed to try to get the review announced by 31 July. The Mayor is now recruiting a propaganda specialist to promote the scheme, at a salary of £75,000. He might actually just withdraw the scheme and let us get on with our lives. Even Labour MPs in London are now turning on the expansion. The Labour candidate in the Uxbridge by-election was apparently in favour of ULEZ, then he was against it, and now he has been kidnapped by his Labour minders in case he actually speaks to voters about the subject.

The Mayor completely ignored residents' views, as 66% of the population of outer London were against ULEZ. I started a petition in my constituency against it, which more than 1,000 people have already signed. I am looking forward to the judge striking down the position, so that we can get back to a consultation and turn the mayoral election next year into a referendum on ULEZ. The key is that a nurse or cleaner working a night shift and on a much lower income than most of society will have to pay £25 to get to and from work. If they start their shift at 8 pm and finish at 4 am, they pay twice in order to get to and from work. There is not even an option to use public transport because there is no service at 4 am and frankly Transport for London is frequently on strike anyway.

The Mayor is a true snollygoster. Unfortunately, he has dreadful dealings with TfL, especially on the Metropolitan line, which runs through part of my constituency. In 2022-23, more than one in seven trains were cancelled. Bear in mind that many of the stations that we are talking about in outer London receive only one train every 30 minutes. That means that many commuters wait up to an hour or more just to get to and from home. I am very disappointed that TfL continues to disrupt the service by striking. It is causing havoc for travellers who need to get to work, hospital, school and so on. I hope that, rather than taking strike action next week, and Labour colleagues joining the picket lines, we can engage in a sensible discussion and get everyone back to work as fast as possible.

There is a truly ridiculous proposal, which has astonished even me, concerning a cluster of high-rise buildings in Edgware. Technically, it is in the neighbouring borough and constituency, but on a small site there are plans for one block of 29 storeys and five other blocks of 24 storeys. That will totally change Edgware town centre, morphing it into a Canary Wharf twin and overwhelming the infrastructure. It will affect my constituency as well. To make matters worse, the construction will take more than four years, killing the businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises already on the high street. I am pleased that my constituents are responding to my consultation on that, and so far 96% are totally opposed.

After a long and challenging selection process, I am delighted that the former leader of Harrow Council, Councillor Susan Hall, has been selected as the Conservative candidate to become the next Mayor of London next year. She has a track record of making Sadiq Khan feel very uncomfortable, having been leader of the City Hall Conservatives since 2019 before standing down to focus on the mayoralty. Many of us will have watched the debates that she has had with Sadiq Khan, often knocking

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him off his pre-written script and exposing his failure to tackle issues head on. The vision is very clear: London is safer with Susan. As the Mayor of London is also the police and crime commissioner, I am confident that she will bring to the role exactly what she is promising, as the chair of the Greater London Authority Police and Crime Committee. She will reverse ULEZ on day one and invest £200 million in the Metropolitan police.

Carrying on the good news, I am pleased that Stefan Voloseniuc, who is a good friend of mine, has been selected as the Conservative party's candidate for Brent and Harrow, which is currently represented by Labour's ULEZ-backing Krupesh Hirani. Stefan emanates from Romania, and we have a very large Romanian population in north-west London, including 12,000 adults of Romanian extraction in my constituency alone. Clearly, it is great to see people from Romania taking an active part, and I am sure that Stefan will be an excellent candidate for us.

In my position as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Israel, I am concerned that there has been a lot of false and misleading propaganda, both in Parliament and online, regarding the recent counter-terrorism operation in the Jenin camp. We should be clear that the Jenin camp is being used as a base for terrorist organisations and used to orchestrate attacks against innocent civilians. The Israel Defence Forces have acted on precise intelligence information and directly targeted terrorist organisations. Indeed, during the operation several hundred improvised explosive devices and thousands of grenades were discovered, and even holy sites such as the al-Nasr mosque have been found with piles of ammunition and explosive devices. The IDF neutralised 11 concealed IEDs in densely populated areas, clearly highlighting the extraordinary terrorist activities in the area, and I am sure that the Israeli security forces will continue to combat the threat of terrorism.

One of the areas I have been particularly active on in this Parliament has been the holocaust memorial and learning centre. I am pleased that the Holocaust Memorial Bill has passed on Second Reading and now goes on to the Select Committee stage. I am grateful to the Whips for appointing me to the Committee to examine this—I am not sure that I will be feeling grateful by the end of September, but we will wait and see. This will act as a memorial to commemorate the men, women and children who were lost during the war. It will also be an education and learning centre, with an accurate account of this slice of history, with testimonies from British perspectives.

On the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran, the position in Iran remains at a critical stage. There has been progress from the Government on tougher sanctions, but frankly it is not enough. We must proscribe the IRGC in its entirety. It is a terrorist organisation and should be highlighted as such. The *Jewish Chronicle* has highlighted the fact that UK universities have funded drone research, which was transferred to Iranian universities and used directly to produce drones. These were then transferred to the Russians to combat the Ukrainians, whom we support, and we salute their brave war against the illegal invasion by Russia.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree with me that academics need to recognise that they do not live in a status free of geopolitics

and national security? We need to see prosecutions brought against some of those academics because they broke sanctions legislation, evaded sanctions and helped undermine sanctions. If we see that, we may finally see academia recognise that it cannot continue to partner with the Chinese Communist party's military organisations or Iranian military organisations. Academics must recognise that, unfortunately, in some situations they are aiding those who would undermine our national security.

Bob Blackman: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I agree completely.

Moving on briefly, I am delighted that my Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Bill was passed, and has in fact received Royal Assent. It has been a long journey, and I would like to thank everyone involved, including Crisis, Ministers, stakeholders and councils. Now we will get on with regulating the rogues and forcing them out of their unfair treatment of vulnerable people.

On the India trade deal, I hope we will see it come out very quickly. A lot of progress has been made, but we still have not got to the final trade deal.

On smoking, yesterday it was four years since the then Health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), announced the Government's ambition for a smoke-free 2030. I was pleased to celebrate that yesterday with the all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health, which I chair. At the event, Dr Javed Khan, the Public Health Minister—my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien)—and others, including the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), spoke extremely well. However, we are not going to hit the target unless prompt action is taken.

Swifties everywhere will be delighted that Martyn's law has been introduced, making it clear that there must be risk assessments for all large venues.

I am pleased to have restarted my tours of Parliament for constituents, following a break during the pandemic. So far, we have brought in more than 6,000 residents for a tour and an often intense question-and-answer session.

While all of us will be returning to our constituencies after today, I will be hosting some 60 students in my constituency for work experience. It is the biggest group I have ever had, and I give warning to my colleagues that there will be an onslaught of photos appearing on our WhatsApp groups with this huge number of people on the streets of Harrow. I am pleased that many of my colleagues have been in touch with my office seeking to know how to run such work experience programmes, and I am sure that as a result young people across the country will be having the opportunity of working with MPs over the summer.

Lest I be considered a flibbertigibbet, I come to the closing elements of my speech. I thank all colleagues in the House, those in the other place, the staff in our teams, the security teams, the catering teams, and everyone else who plays a key part in keeping everything afloat. I wish them a very restful, jolly and fruitful summer recess, spending valuable time with family and friends and, perhaps, on the streets as the general election comes ever nearer, and I wish those celebrating earlier in the week a very happy Muharram. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for initiating this debate;

I have served on the Committee for some 12 years, and I enjoy working with its Chairman, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns).

Finally, I pay tribute to my great friend—who will always be remembered in this place, not least for his input to these debates, but also for his bright and lovely service to this House and to this country—Sir David Amess. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

12.50 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this afternoon’s debate, and all the Chairs for the many times they have called on me this year. I thank all the House staff who keep this place running day to day, whether that is the Library, the Table Office, or the kitchen staff who provide sustenance over the long sitting days—we are all grateful. It is hard to believe that this is the second year that we are holding this debate without its now namesake and star contributor, Sir David Amess. He was certainly a hard act to follow, and even in his absence today, that remains the case. He was an exceptional MP, someone who showed me great kindness, as I know he did for many colleagues.

There are lots of things I want to speak about. The first is a case that was opened by my office in August 2021 following the withdrawal from Afghanistan. My constituent was desperately trying to help his young wife leave Kabul—I spoke about this case many times in the Chamber. She is the daughter of a translator who worked for the allied troops, and was in immeasurable danger. There are some cases that you cannot help but form an emotional attachment to, and for my team, this was one of them. As such, when we found out last month that the young woman had finally reached Scotland after almost two years, countless letters to countless Ministers and hundreds of calls to UK Visas and Immigration, there was enormous relief.

I have taken many an opportunity in this place to criticise the Home Office and its processes, but today I want to give some praise. The change to an account management system for Members has transformed the relationship my team has with the Department, with open and honest dialogue about cases now being the norm. I am grateful that the majority of cases my team takes to the Home Office these days are resolved within a reasonable timeframe.

The thing about casework is that Members never know what is going to land on their desk next. Some cases are straightforward, some are frustrating to resolve, and some are a little bizarre, but every single one of them relates to a real person facing a real problem that is having a detrimental effect on their life. Even during the busiest periods, it is so important that we do not start looking at casework as a numbers game. That, I am proud to say, is something that my team and I are always keenly aware of. There are some cases where we do not even know where to start in order to resolve it, such as the one that had my chief of staff calling around registry offices in Mexico to track down a marriage certificate on behalf of a couple who contacted me with a visa issue when they were moving overseas. Despite having a very short timescale to work on, we managed to pull off a great result for them.

Some cases seem like they should be straightforward but getting the right result is harder than it should be. My office and I do not admit defeat easily, though,

which is how one of my team managed to secure £4,173.28 in backdated pension credit for a constituent, along with a £100 goodwill payment.

Some cases are complex by nature, because we are limited by the provisions of Government policy, and only a change in policy and legislation will provide the support a constituent needs. There is no better example of that than the green deal mis-selling scandal, which was widespread in Scotland and has had long-lasting, hugely devastating effects on many households, impacts that were worsened tenfold by the soaring cost of energy over the past year or two. I still have open casework relating to that scandal, but very little recourse is available to those constituents. I have written to Ministers and met with a number of them, but unfortunately there is little appetite to reopen the cases. The ones left, those that were not resolved by the initial response to the scandal, are the ones that will not be easy to fix. Instead, some victims have had to take their case to tribunal, and my constituents now have to wait for the outcomes of those cases. I will continue to advocate on their behalf, though; I will not accept that there is nothing Ministers can offer.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Does the hon. Member share my disgust that, years after I was told by Ministers in this place that they were quite willing to accept that all Helms customers had essentially been ripped off and should be recompensed, we are still waiting for compensation for our constituents?

Margaret Ferrier: I could not agree more. A lot of us have been fighting for those affected by green deal mis-selling. Unfortunately, Helms did not get its comeuppance.

Child Maintenance Service-related casework has also dominated a lot of time in my office this term. A short while ago, I was delighted to bring two of my constituents to an all-party parliamentary group meeting, where they spoke about their experiences with the system and the difficulties it has caused them. Letting someone explain in their own words how the system has failed them can be very powerful. Some CMS cases have been open with my office for two years or so, and not for lack of effort to get them resolved. I am pleased to say, however, that the longest standing case was recently resolved, with a constituent finally being allowed to move to collect and pay after years of her ex-partner refusing to keep up with payments. Perseverance is key in many of these cases—never taking no for an answer—because I recognise that ultimately it is the children who lose out.

There is another kind of inquiry that every Member gets from constituents—often hundreds every month, spanning a broad spectrum of issues. I am of course talking about lobby emails. I have always been clear that any constituent who writes to me will get a response, so every one of these emails relating to any policy is read and gets a personal answer—over 1,200 since the start of this year alone. No matter the issue, be it the cost of living, the minimum wage, pensions, or perhaps the sale of live lobsters on Amazon, or new classifications and restrictions on imported reptiles, wherever possible I take my constituents’ concerns and turn them into action. Sometimes I send a letter to the Minister responsible; sometimes, if the opportunity presents itself, I raise it here in the Chamber, as I did the “Boys Need Bins”

[Margaret Ferrier]

campaign, which aims to improve the provision of sanitary bins in male public toilets and to remove the stigma around male incontinence.

When a constituent asked me, following her father's bicycle accident, to raise the importance of wearing a helmet on the roads, I did so during a recent session of business questions. Constituent requests dictate the majority of my diary even when I am down here in London, attending specific debates at their request or dropping in at parliamentary events to hear more about particular issues. They elected me to make their voice heard, and that is what I strive to do every day I am here.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this job is seeing the impact our work has on real people and spending time with our local communities. I had a lovely time at two big constituency events recently, starting with Landemer day in Rutherglen. A long-standing traditional gala day, it was wonderful to see young Rutherglen High School student Ruby crowned the Landemer queen, supported by her court and the many attendees on the day. I also enjoyed Summerfest in Cambuslang earlier this month, although, sadly, it looks as though that may be the final one, after a quarter of a century. Organisers Liz and John and the event committee have done their community proud, and I know that I am not alone in my appreciation of their hard work over the years.

There was set to be another community fun day event in Hillhouse this year, but unfortunately, thanks to a group of youths, the community council now has a mountain to climb to make it happen. The youths broke into the storage unit where donations for the local food bank and equipment for the fun day were being stored and set it on fire—a deliberate act of destruction, just for the sake of destroying something. Thousands of pounds-worth of equipment used for the benefit of the community now needs replacing. The community council has my full support, and I hope it can reach its fundraising target. Unfortunately, antisocial behaviour seems to be an issue in many parts of the constituency at the moment. That has been voiced to me by many small businesses in the area. It is not abnormal to see a rise in that behaviour over the summer months as schools break up and good weather pushes more people outside. I find myself speaking to local police officers about it often, and I place on record my thanks to the local inspectors for my area, who have engaged openly and regularly with me and my team. I also wish to place on record my thanks for the hard work of the Royal Burgh Of Rutherglen, Cambuslang, Halfway, Hillhouse, Blantyre, Burnside and Meikle Earnock Community Councils, which do so much work for the residents in the local area. It is very much appreciated by me and many of my constituents.

I have five more thanks to give today, and I have saved the best for last. As Members of the House, we all know how important it is that every member of our staff cares about our constituency as much as we do. After all, we could not do our jobs effectively without their support behind us. I can say with absolute confidence that every member of my staff has the same passion for the work and the people we serve as I do, so I take this opportunity to thank Kim Glendenning, Natalie Burgess, Gillian Mair, Hannah Nicol and Rowan Clark for their continued dedication, loyalty and hard work for the constituents of Rutherglen and Hamilton West. I will come

to a close now. I am surprised I was called so early, so thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish every colleague across this House, members of staff and House staff a restful summer break.

1.1 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am increasingly concerned about developments in Bosnia, a country for which I have a great affection. Watching what happens there has understandably gone off the international boil, which is unsurprising considering what is happening in Ukraine, but we should not forget what has happened there in the past and could easily happen there again. In my view, the situation in Bosnia is rather like picking up a lemonade bottle and shaking it around. When we put it down, we think it is still clear and there has been no change, but try taking the top off. Bosnia could easily be like that.

Bosnia has a population of about 3.2 million people. On fundamental religious grounds, the population splits three main ways, though everyone is racially south Slav. Muslims make up about 51%, and they are often called Bosniaks. Eastern Orthodox Christians represent 31%, and are often called Bosnian Serbs. The Roman Catholic population, often called Bosnian Croats, is about 15%. The House will recall that the Bosnian Serbs attacked their neighbours in 1992, seizing large tracts of ground, which they—horrid words—ethnically cleansed of non-Serbs. As the war went on, the Croats and Muslims also carried out their own versions of ethnic cleansing. An estimated 2 million people were driven from their homes by the end of the war.

In September 1992, the United Nations authorised a deployment to Bosnia of a military force called the United Nations protection force. The UN troops were dubbed peacekeepers, but actually they were hardly that. There was no peace to keep in Bosnia and the UNPROFOR did not have the mandate to enforce it either. Although several British Army observers, medics and liaison staff were already on the ground in Sarajevo and elsewhere, Britain's main contribution to the UNPROFOR was a battlegroup based on the 1st Battalion, the Cheshire Regiment and a reconnaissance squadron of the 9th/12th Lancers. Actually, about 2,400 troops deployed under what was called Operation Grapple in November 1992. Some might recall that I was the unfortunate British battlegroup commander.

Since then, British military personnel have been involved in Bosnia one way or another, and 59 service personnel have lost their lives. Among those deaths was my escort driver, Lance Corporal Wayne Edwards, and my interpreter, Dobrila Kalaba. Both were shot in the head by snipers, and their loss still haunts me as I was responsible for them, or responsible for where they were.

The war, which started in 1991, shortly before I was first there, continued until the massacre of Srebrenica in July 1995 and ended with the Dayton peace accords in 1996. That stopped the fighting and established a triumvirate of uneasy power sharing between the three major sides: Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks. Dayton was supposed to last only a few years until politics could be adjusted to make Bosnia a somewhat democratic and viable state, but the Dayton arrangements have become the status quo, and they are cracking at the seams.

For several years now, the Bosnian Serbs in so-called Republika Srpska have been seriously threatening to break away, and periodically the Bosnian Croats are making similar growling noises. Almost all authorities on the region believe that if that happens, we could easily see the renewal of civil war. Between 1992 and 1996, approximately 200,000 people were killed in the Bosnian civil war and, as I have mentioned, 2 million people were displaced from their homes. Please, God, that tragedy must not be repeated.

Alicia Kearns: A number of us in the House speak regularly on this issue, and I fear that sometimes colleagues feel that it is a repeated mantra and we are just fearful for no reason or there is not an escalation. My right hon. Friend mentioned Dodik's secessionist policies; Dodik has now introduced a new law that disappplies to Republika Srpska the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina's rulings. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is the most acute threat to the Dayton agreement that we have ever seen? When we raise our voices in the House and say we are concerned, it is because of meaningful changes that put at risk peace on the ground.

Bob Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend, who is a very good friend, for intervening on an extremely pertinent point to which I will return in a little while.

I believe that we, the British, are in a good position to influence what happens in Bosnia. Our reputation is high as a result of the actions of our diplomats, soldiers and politicians over the years. In that respect, I should mention my very good friend, the late Lord Paddy Ashdown, who was the High Representative. He was outstanding, and his reputation for dealing with very tricky situations remains untouched by anyone else since. When I visit Bosnia, people always say to me that they wish Paddy was still there. In my experience, the one thing that Bosnians respect is well-motivated and professional people who are not corrupt, who are on the ground, know what they are doing and are prepared to act. Paddy Ashdown was certainly that.

I do not suppose it will come as a surprise to colleagues that our armed forces fit the bill quite well too. Currently, we have very few military forces on the ground in Bosnia and we do not contribute to the so-called EUFOR, the European Union Force in Bosnia, which is utterly and completely useless and does nothing but wander around the country flag-waving, sitting in vehicles and sending back irrelevant reports. I gather we have a few staff officers at the nascent NATO headquarters recently established there, although for some extraordinary reason I was not allowed to visit the place when I was there recently.

I have been to Bosnia three times in the past 12 months. For several years I have argued that it would send a significant signal were we to send a British battlegroup to Bosnia, perhaps under NATO command. I suggest this again, and it should happen soon—especially as there is growing evidence of the increasing malign influence of Russia among Bosnian Serbs.

As I care about Bosnia, I find it a particular tragedy that around 100,000 people normally leave the country every year, out of a population of 3.4 million. They are predominantly young, well-trained people. Imagine if a similar proportion—about 3%—of our young in the

UK were to leave each year: it would be a disaster for our country and for our future. Bosnia is heavily bleeding the very people who should be the future of the country. Those people would not be leaving if they believed they could have a decent job and raise their families in a society that was fair and not corrupt; I am afraid that corruption remains endemic in Bosnia.

I know that our ambassador and Ministers, especially the Prime Minister's trade envoy for the region, my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers)—who was here but has disappeared; I did not warn him that I was going to refer to him—are fully aware of the situation, and my hon. Friend works really hard on it. On that point, let me pay credit to my very good friend, the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who sets aside quite a lot of her time for caring about what happens in the Balkans, but for that reason she has been pilloried and threatened. I point out to the House that we have a brave lady here, who stands up and speaks for people and tries to help them.

Obviously, Bosnia remains personal to me. Our armed forces paid a blood price to help the people there. I remember one of my soldiers saying, when I told him that we might have to withdraw because those were the orders I was getting, "We can't leave this place, sir—these people, these women and children, these men. They would be massacred if we weren't here. We've got to help them; we're not leaving." I thought, "My God, I'm going to have a mutiny."

I think the people of Bosnia are superb, in all three so-called ethnic-religious groups. The decent people of Bosnia just want to be given the chance to live their lives in safety, to have their children educated and their politics work, and for corruption not be endemic. We lost 57 British personnel trying to help them do that. They must not have died in vain. We should do all we can to help the people of Bosnia.

1.12 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I certainly concur with his remarks on Bosnia.

I would describe myself as a fairly assiduous attendee on a Thursday in this place, but in eight years this is the first recess debate that I have taken part in. I did have eight years' worth of recess issues to discuss, but obviously this is a busy debate compared to some previous ones, so I have had to pare down my remarks.

The fact that the debate is so well subscribed is a testament and fitting tribute to Sir David, and I add my own tribute to those who have discussed him and the great work he did here, with a smile on his face at every turn. I also remember Jo Cox, another colleague of ours who was taken. Both Members were taken carrying out the bread and butter of a good constituency MP: taking part in constituency advice surgeries. I remember them both.

I recently met senior staff members at Recovery Across Mental Health—RAMH for short—which is a third sector mental health organisation situated in Paisley that provides essential support throughout Renfrewshire. I heard at first hand the very real challenges that the workforce are experiencing. We all know that there has never been a greater pressure on public finances, in part due to a global pandemic and the war in Ukraine, but

[Gavin Newlands]

mostly as a result of 13 years of Tory austerity. The Scottish Government are trying desperately to balance the books while also meeting the ever increasing demand for Government support and intervention—and balancing those books gets harder every year.

Time and again, the UK Government are asked to step up and tackle the broken social care sector and provide the additional funding it so desperately needs. The potential ripple effects, if steps are not taken to address issues in the sector, will be catastrophic. Without these organisations, the public health and social care sector will become overwhelmed, which will have a negative impact on the quality and standards of care. The third sector fills a void left by the NHS and local authorities and helps to ensure that individuals can live independently in the community with adequate support. The third sector workforce continue to be let down, overworked, understaffed, underpaid and, crucially, under-represented. With the pressure and high level of moral accountability put on staff, many are now experiencing burnout. Perhaps we are heading for a national social care crisis, so we must do more.

As chair of both the all-party parliamentary group for Scottish sport and the all-party parliamentary group on White Ribbon UK, I am all too aware of the barriers that women and girls face in the sporting arena. Participation and representation are essential in driving gender equality while improving the health and wellbeing of women and girls, and that must happen through a grassroots approach. I had the opportunity to meet Kyniska Advocacy, which campaigns for progressive policies in women's sport with the ambition of enacting change. It is essential that the sporting world ensures that both men and women have equal opportunities and levels of respect and, crucially, that they feel safe in taking part in sport, particularly with those in a position of trust.

I also recently met with Miss J, the founder of the campaign group End Sexual Misconduct in Sport, who bravely shared her lived experience to raise awareness and to end sexual misconduct in sport. As I mentioned at business questions this morning, she has asked that all professional sports teams in Scotland, and hopefully beyond, sign up to a sexual misconduct policy. The fact that so many teams are failing to do so speaks volumes about the struggle we face.

If we want to encourage current and future generations to take part in sport safely, protection is paramount. As a number of recent scandals have shown, a huge amount of work remains to ensure that sport is a place where women and girls can feel safe and where perpetrators of abuse are dealt with appropriately. We all have a responsibility and duty not only to be opposed to misogyny, but to actively call it out. The making of excuses for locker-room chat because “boys will be boys” further empowers the misogynist narrative, and that must stop.

Just this week, Glasgow United FC announced that convicted rapist David Goodwillie has been selected for an upcoming match. That horrendous decision again sends the wrong message not only to the victims of sexual violence, but to younger fans who idolise these teams and sportsmen. As shown in the case of Mason Greenwood, industries must do more to tackle gender-based violence, and that starts with the development of domestic

abuse policies and procedures. I am all for giving people second chances, but they must, at the very least, show remorse for their actions if they wish to be given that opportunity. Sporting institutions and our players are influential public figures and can significantly challenge sexual misconduct in sport, and they must do more.

Like many parents these last few weeks, I found myself caught between Ticketmaster and the pleading angelic faces of my Taylor-Swift-loving daughters. The steps designed to deter secondary ticketing resulted in a chaotic frenzy, with many customers who registered for a code to purchase tickets being unsuccessful, and those who were successful attempting to sell these free codes online for astronomical prices. Ticketmaster has also implemented a “lead Booker” policy on UK tour dates, resulting in severe implications for ticketholders, as many parents who managed to buy tickets for their children must attend the concert because they are unable to pass on all the tickets to their children or their friends.

We often talk, rightly, about the largely unregulated secondary ticketing market. We need to take action on the obscene excess profits of ticket merchants such as Ticketmaster. For example, regular tickets on the AEG site were being sold for £600 each or thereabouts, and AEG's fee for four tickets was £250—just for processing a transaction that takes mere seconds. Surely that is not right. In fact, it is more than most bands would make from a ticket sale for a regular concert. It is crazy that that is allowed, and we must do more. We should also ban dynamic pricing for concerts, which means that no prices are published prior to sale, with tickets priced on demand, meaning they often cost hundreds of pounds and allowing Ticketmaster and AEG and the like to include excessive charges.

Following my election eight ago I have worked with Women Against State Pension Inequality campaigners in seeking to secure justice from a UK Government who are keen to wash their hands of the whole episode. The campaign pushes for fair transitional state pension arrangements for all women born in the 1950s who have been affected by changes to state pension legislation brought in by the 1995 Tory Government. More than 12,000 women across my constituency were affected by the changes that raised the pension age initially from 60 to 65, and then to 66 and 67 by 2028.

The lack of notification, communication and clear guidance by the Government resulted in many women having to make life-changing decisions, having a detrimental impact both financially and emotionally. In 2021 the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman ruled against the Government in the WASPI battle, with the watchdog ruling that the Department for Work and Pensions was guilty of maladministration by failing to provide adequate notice to 3.8 million women.

However, the WASPI women continue to be let down, with delays in settling compensation ongoing two years after the ruling. A constituent of mine is one of the six test cases the ombudsman is looking at. Her situation was misrepresented in the stage 2 findings. It has had to be looked at again, so I hope it will be resolved. It is essential that in these final stages of settlements, WASPI women receive the compensation they deserve with no further delays. Many women have waited for years, and many have died, sadly. We need to get this done and get it done soon.

Finally, August will see the world cycling championships coming to Scotland. It is a massive event, with more competitors than the Commonwealth games in 2014. It will be the first time almost every discipline of the sport comes together in one place so we can see all the best competitors on earth push themselves and their bikes to the limit. The riders in the Tour de France will be there to try to win the right to wear the rainbow jersey for next year, and the event will, I hope, capture the public imagination. I know that roads across the central belt and beyond will be lined with people cheering on their favourites.

It will be broadcast on the BBC free for everybody to watch. Sadly, however, as I mentioned this morning, and as we are seeing certainly across the Scottish news headlines today, our men's national football team does not enjoy that level of exposure. Its matches have been locked behind a paywall during the most successful spell for the Scotland men's national team in 25 years. That has been incredibly frustrating for most Scottish football fans, particularly during a cost of living crisis when every penny is a prisoner and additional TV subscriptions are at best not a priority and often simply affordable.

Earlier this year I hosted a summit of the main broadcasters in Scotland and the main rights holder, Viaplay. There was a real willingness to discuss what is a complex issue and work constructively to see what can be done, but the bottom line is this is about much more than rights, fees and subscriber numbers. We have seen that today, with Viaplay trying to exit the UK market and sell on its football rights, which include the league cup in Scotland and the Scotland men's national team—it also holds the rights to the Welsh and Northern Irish men's national teams. I have many phone calls to make on this issue after this debate is over.

Both our men's and women's national football teams play a huge role in our national culture, and more so than most because our opportunities to perform on the international stage have been a little limited in recent years, sadly. The Government have a major role to play in working with the footballing authorities, broadcasters and regulators to recognise that importance and the need for people in Scotland to enjoy the same access to their men's national team as that enjoyed by their counterparts in England and Wales through Channel 4 and S4C respectively. It is time for the Secretary of State to meet me, because I was promised a meeting back in December. My office has chased month after month; I have raised this twice now at business questions and I have even raised it at Prime Minister's questions, but I cannot get a meeting with the Secretary of State. I hope, given the news today, I will finally get that meeting.

1.24 pm

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this Sir David Amess Adjournment debate. There are a number of issues that I would like to raise before the House adjourns.

First, on health, I am delighted that we have secured £19.4 million for a new community diagnostic centre in Scunthorpe. That, alongside our new A&E, which I have had the pleasure of looking around—thankfully, not as a patient—is very significant for Scunthorpe and a once-in-a-generation improvement in our local healthcare provision. I was particularly delighted to see how pleased

the staff in the A&E were with their new facilities and the fact that they had been consulted and involved in the decisions that were made as the A&E was designed.

Alongside that good news, I want to raise the issue of access to NHS dentistry, which continues to be a concern for my constituents. I would like to press the Government again on the idea of a tie-in, which I know has been discussed, so that those we help to train as dentists then spend a certain percentage of their time delivering NHS dental care to patients. My constituents should be able to access an NHS dentist with ease, and I want to push the Government to ensure that that is the case.

Again, on health, it has been a privilege to work with the family of local man David Hopkins, who sadly died of a brain tumour. Alongside David's wife, Nicki, I have been working with the all-party parliamentary group on brain tumours. We have looked carefully at how we can get the £40 million that the Government have committed to brain tumour research into the hands of the researchers. While we are delighted that the money has been put in place, and it is hugely significant, we have to expedite the research and the testing that is required, so that we can help these patients.

It has similarly been a privilege to work alongside our local charity The Beat Goes On, which was founded by Stephen and Gill Ayling following the tragic death of their son, Nathan. I am a little bit older than Nathan was, but we went to the same school, and I regularly speak to people in the constituency who remember him very fondly. We are incredibly proud of Stephen and Gill in Scunthorpe. Their campaign to improve the diagnosis rate of cardiac conditions in people aged between 14 and 35 has already saved lives.

Stephen and Gill came to London earlier this year, and we met the Minister for Primary Care and Public Health, who was extremely helpful. I want to raise again with the Government the need for further research into the effectiveness of screening and to consider what is done in other countries and in sport. I would be grateful if the Department of Health and Social Care could provide a further update on that, and specifically on the potential for review.

I want to raise the excellent work being done by those at Prostate Cancer Lincs and Humber, a superb local group that supports our community and raises awareness. They seem to be everywhere I go—they are incredibly prolific—and I am really grateful for all the work they do. When a family or individual is affected by cancer, whether it be prostate or another form of the illness, it is incredibly difficult. It was an honour to spend some time recently with Joanne Sowerby. Joanne is a really special person, and the work she does in our community through Hope House is exceptional, providing support groups, counselling and therapy and helping to access a home-cooked meal. I know that the work Joanne and her team do makes a huge difference, and I want to register my thanks to her before the House rises.

Another area that requires continued engagement is transport. While the Government's £2 bus fare scheme was welcomed in Scunthorpe and has gone a long way to address the affordability of public transport, the reliability of local service providers has been a problem in recent months on our trains. However, I am hopeful that under new management, we will see improvements in rail services, and I hope to raise the specific issue of ticket offices in the House later this evening.

[Holly Mumby-Croft]

It would be a strange day were I to stand up in the Chamber and not raise the issue of steelmaking. I welcomed the Secretary of State for Business and Trade to our steelworks in May, where I was able to explain again to the Government that we make the finest steel in the world in Scunthorpe. I have said this in the House many times: none of us can go a single day without needing to use steel, and that will remain the case. We use steel for everything we do, from defence to growth, and we must never, ever lose the ability to make our own.

Before the House adjourns, I want again to raise my concerns about the long-term future of steelmaking. If we ever lose the ability to make our own steel, we will still need to use it and will simply have to ship it from all over the world, from places very far away that will choose how much to charge us, and we will face all the ethical, environmental and strategic concerns that that inevitably brings. I know that the Government have been a good supporter of steel in the past, through the safeguards and through paying people's wages in Scunthorpe. We remember that well in my constituency. I want to press the Government again before we adjourn to continue to recognise the strategic importance of this industry and its importance to my Scunthorpe constituency.

In closing, I want to mention the Redbourne Centre, an outstanding residential home in my constituency that I visited recently. I think I was supposed to go for half an hour, but I ended up staying for two hours, because it was so wonderful. I thank all those who work in the care sector in my constituency and throughout the country. The work they were doing at the Redbourne Centre was incredible. I particularly enjoyed hearing from a gentleman who lives there about how he had visited Parliament when he was a child and his memories of visiting the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft. I put on record my sincere thanks to everyone in my constituency who works in that sector.

I also want to wish you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and all right hon. and hon. Members a safe, healthy and enjoyable recess.

1.30 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I, too, would like to add my voice of thanks and gratitude to all the various officers of this House—in the Speaker's Office, the Ways and Means office, the Doorkeepers, *Hansard*, the various Vote Offices, the Table Office and the Admission Order Office, and all those who make our job in this place so much easier. I thank them and wish them all the very best for the summer recess. Of course, they will still be here working while we go back to our constituencies, but it is important to place on record our thanks and gratitude to them.

I want to draw a couple of matters to the attention of the House. We recently had a budget debate for Northern Ireland. That was a very painful process; it was so punishing that it has probably set back the prospect of restoring the devolution settlement to Northern Ireland. It is very important that we put on record that, even if an Executive were called back, they would not have the resources available that are necessary to run Northern Ireland.

We constantly hear in this place about the necessity of Barnett consequential, which send money back to Northern Ireland, but under this budget settlement, any Barnett consequential that Northern Ireland would get

would have to be paid back immediately to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury, and could not be used for the things that they would normally offset, such as teachers' pay, police service recruitment, nurses' pay and all the things that are now slowly but surely being addressed on the mainland of Great Britain.

That is a significant problem for us. If we take teachers' pay in Northern Ireland, the average first-year teacher in Northern Ireland will get between £6,000 and £8,000 less than their counterpart here in Great Britain, depending which part of GB they are in. That disparity in wages is atrocious, and we can take that through all the pay arrangements in the various public sector areas, whether it is policing, nursing, junior doctors, teachers or civil servants. It really is quite disheartening for those members of staff. We are fed the idea, "Get the Executive back, get it up and running, and you can address these problems." But we cannot, because the resource will not be there. It is important that I put that on the record. We do want to see a functioning Northern Ireland Executive, but they have to function under proper circumstances. I am poised to ask the question of how we can address that. It is important to say that there must be a resource somewhere that will allow us to redress this lack of money.

I will address that in the second part of my speech, which is about what I believe to be a national scandal of public waste—even corruption, in some aspects—that must be addressed by the Government. The much-hyped, much-promised HS2 project really needs to be examined closely by this House. In my view, it is depriving this kingdom and its people of billions of pounds of resources, which could be used in a much better way, but which are currently being siphoned off into the single biggest white elephant this country has pursued.

Someone in this House has to stand up at some point and say, "The emperor has no clothes." With regards to HS2, the emperor has no clothes. It is a waste of public resources. I, for one, am pro infrastructure projects. I want to see infrastructure projects. I would love to see a proper, high-speed rail network from the very far east, from Leeds, right the way down to the capital. That would be great, but it is never going to happen—certainly not under HS2. This is a wasteful, mad and utterly out-of-control project that the House must look at. There was a debate in Westminster Hall about it way back in 2021, in which we called for a full debate in the Chamber. That has never taken place. I have asked Front Benchers for that debate, as have other Members, but it has not happened, though there have been many promises. Neither the Government nor the Opposition want it to happen, and I do not know why.

I asked the Library to outline for me which building companies in Northern Ireland were working on the project. There were many promises given that the project would be a bonanza for companies across the whole United Kingdom, but that has not been the case. Many companies have been left out. Some of the people who have lost out have supported and donated to my party. That is not a personal registered interest—it does not have to be, because the support was for the party—but I put that on record in the interests of transparency and openness. I am making these comments because of the waste to the rail service. The money spent on the project could have been used to plug many of the gaps that colleagues across this House want to be plugged.

On 27 March this year, the National Audit Office, and on 7 July, the Public Accounts Committee, published reports on the subject. They are the most depressing reading, because they confirm our worst fears about Euston's redevelopment, and other aspects of the project. That forced Lord Berkeley in the other place to say,

"Time seems nigh to cancel both projects, HS2 Euston and the wider HS2 programme, before any further public money is wasted."

Despite the various requirements for Euston having been known for the last eight years, nothing has happened on that project. In fact, there has been almost a decade of complete waste. There is no agreement about the number or development of platforms, or the station lay-out. No design solutions have been put in place. All the problems were known well before Royal Assent was given to the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Act way back in 2017, yet in madness, the Government pursued HS2. That has resulted in the biggest waste of public money. Eight years into the planning process, we are calling a halt to some of the building. I understand that in recent weeks, the chief executive officer of HS2, Mr Thurston, has had to stand down. He has retired after six and a half years. His legacy is one of blown budgets. HS2 was initially scheduled to start running in 2026, but there will not be a single train running by then. Under the current construction and budgeting guidelines, it could be the mid-2030s or even 2040 before it is up and running.

Meanwhile, the initial budget of £55 billion has been completely blown. In 2019, I sat in this Chamber when the Minister told us that the budget for HS2 would be £55.7 billion. Two months later, the chairman of HS2, Allan Cook, raised the figure to £88.6 billion. A matter of months later, the Oakervee review said, "I'm sorry, it will actually be over £106 billion." How can the Government be so wrong in their calculations? They are not out by a few million, but by tens of billions of pounds. That is wholly unacceptable and wholly inadequate. HS2 Ltd's latest report shows that the chief executive receives over £617,000 per year in salary, yet the management of this project has been an unmitigated disaster, and we are no nearer an HS2 train running than we were way back in 2017, when this whole thing started.

Those in charge of HS2 seem to have been tempering expectations recently. The Secretary of State for Transport has had to pause the work on Euston station for two years because, believe it or not, it has already exceeded its budget of £2.6 billion and the cost now stands at £4.8 billion. Meanwhile, the eastern leg of phase 2b, from the west midlands to the east midlands, has fallen in the pecking order and probably will not happen either.

There is no money for nurses, there is no money for junior doctors, and there is no money for police officers. There is little money for education, there is little money for other projects, and there is little money for some of our defence expenditure. Yet, hopelessly, this white elephant keeps getting funded, and keeps getting either silence or support from Members in this House. That has to be called out. The Government must take a long, hard look at this over the summer, and recognise that this white elephant must cease to be funded.

1.40 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to take part in the debate, named in honour of our late colleague Sir David Amess. I participated in these debates

with him for many years. Indeed, I participated in an interview with him to promote his book three weeks before he was sadly killed. He was a great friend.

I also pay tribute to my right hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who is sitting in front of me. It is to the huge benefit of the House that he did not suffer the same fate as his driver and his interpreter in that car. His speech demonstrated, loudly and clearly, to the House and the nation how important it is to have colleagues here with different skills and different knowledge.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): May I add, very briefly, to what my hon. Friend has said? We are all aware that my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) did great service to his country in Bosnia, for which he was rightfully awarded the Distinguished Service Order. He was far too modest to mention that, but I think that it is worth putting it on the record none the less.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for adding to my tribute.

I now want to raise two urgent issues related to shooting and farming. Before doing so, I should declare my interest as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on shooting and conservation, vice-president of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, a shoot partner and a farmer.

I very much regret the necessity to raise the unexpected policy change on the part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that will deprive shoots releasing gamebirds on special protection areas with a 500-metre buffer zone of the benefit of general licence 43, forcing each of them to apply to Natural England, which will then advise Ministers on the signing off of each individual licence to release gamebirds. I ask the House to bear with me as I explain the importance of that decision, which DEFRA took in full knowledge of the shooting calendar and communicated to shoots even though birds had already been ordered and were about to be released. It has caused chaos around the country and resulted in an animal welfare crisis, threatened redundancies, shoot closures and the bankruptcies of rural businesses. In short, this is a disaster for rural affairs.

Something similar happened in the spring of 2019 when, after a legal challenge by anti-shooting pressure groups, Natural England revoked the general licences to control pest birds at precisely the point when the protection given by shoots to ground-nesting, laying and fledging birds was critical for their survival. There was a similar outcry from shoots at that time, and the then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), reacted very differently. He took over Natural England's functions, and issued new general licences which allowed the necessary pest control. He was a Minister who knew what was right, and he was not overawed by Natural England. What a difference from the way in which the matter is being handled today!

In this case, it is unacceptable for Ministers to treat stakeholders like mushrooms, promising them consultation and engagement, accepting the need for early notice, and then keeping them in the dark. That is precisely what happened in this case, despite earlier promises.

[Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

Shooting organisations were given only a few days' notice of a significant policy change, with the feeble excuse that circumstances did not permit consultation. Ministers knew that supplies of game birds were ordered in November and December before release in the following June and July. That was contained in their evidence to the courts in the judicial review in 2019, so they should have known that their decision would leave shoots in an impossible position, expecting imminent delivery of thousands of birds that could not be released and could not be culled, with very limited market for resale.

Birds over nine weeks old cannot be kept in pens because they would attack each other—hence the animal welfare crisis to which DEFRA has offered no solutions yet. Shoots have been refused licences, with estates threatened with bankruptcy. Military shoots, which provide social benefits for veterans, have been shut down, and shoots with excellent conservation credentials over decades have been refused a licence even though they protect rare and magnificent bird species that inhabit their land. Who will protect those species if the gamekeeper has been made redundant?

Meanwhile, the application process for a licence is in an almighty mess, with decisions delayed, applications muddled and lost, shoots left waiting for weeks for a decision, and those that have been given licences in some cases subject to unworkable and increasingly bizarre restrictions. It is simply not possible to keep birds ready to be released now until September and to get birds in any numbers at that date, and it is unethical to shoot such young birds when the season starts.

Why has this happened? DEFRA's justification for this disaster is the prevention of avian influenza, AI, but that justification is deeply flawed. No game bird has ever been released when infected by AI. There is no record of any wild bird being infected by the release of game birds. Outbreaks of AI in the UK do not correlate to the areas in which game birds are released and do not occur when game birds are released. The Netherlands has similar levels of AI, yet it has no game birds released. This is not a game bird issue. The shadow habitats regulation assessment provided by Natural England to Ministers in January 2023 has not been shared with the people whose livelihoods and businesses are now being destroyed. Will the Minister undertake to publish and share it with all those affected?

If the assessment justified such a drastic change in policy for shooting, presumably DEFRA requested similar assessments for other activities that occur in special protection areas. For example, did Ministers request assessments on waterbird feeding events, seabird tourism events, and birdwatching events such as the call to come and see two wonderful bee-eaters at Trimmingham? That event attracted more than 15,000 birdwatchers. That is fantastic, but it must have carried a risk of transmitting AI. Furthermore, public access to the coastal path and bird-ringing activities all carry a risk of transmitting AI.

If Ministers did not request assessments for those activities, will today's Minister explain why shooting was singled out? I am told that the decision to change the policy was made as late as 12 April—it should have happened many months earlier—but shooting organisations were not informed for over a month. I am also told that civil servants were under an explicit instruction not to

communicate any changes to the shooting organisations ahead of time. I wonder whether that was an instruction from officials or Ministers.

Let me give the House some examples of the impact on shoots of DEFRA's decision. A colleague told me this week that a syndicate shoot rented by working men in the north that has been the only shoot in the area to protect nesting hen harriers for years has been refused a licence. A community shoot operating around military firing ranges involving veterans, some of whom have post-traumatic stress disorder and welcome the social engagement that the shoot provides, was also refused a licence.

Here are some quotes from people who run shoots:

"Disaster, we have the first day shooting on the 20th October, no chance the birds will be hardy and fit. We will have to refund guns £14,000."

"Unsustainable loss for us and Court action with suppliers and possibly death by gassing for a lot of healthy birds."

"Believing an October release date would be a workable solution for any shoot just shows the lack of knowledge and understanding the people processing these licences have. Shoots will be forced to close leading to catastrophic consequences, not only to jobs and businesses in these areas but also to conservation."

"It will bankrupt the shoot, two gamekeepers will lose their jobs, just not practical at all."

Given that these people had a legitimate expectation that DEFRA would honour its promises to

"engage early and consult with the industry",

and a legitimate expectation, when they ordered the birds, that the licensing regime would not change, will the Minister commit to providing compensation to those shoots that have and will lose out entirely because of DEFRA's decisions?

The Minister knows that I, and many colleagues, sought assurances on numerous occasions that this problem would be sorted out, and we were given those assurances. I very much regret the necessity to say that those assurances have not been honoured. In the light of that, and the catalogue of mistakes and injustice, will the Minister not take the obvious decision that addresses the problem that the Department has created for itself and others, and immediately renew general licence 43 for all shoots located on specially protected areas? That general licence has subsisted for decades and I cannot see why we need it to be withdrawn at this juncture.

Secondly, I would like to raise the urgent issue of the higher-level stewardship scheme, which a number of people in my farming constituency have contacted me about in the last week. The deadline is approaching for many to transfer from the higher-level stewardship scheme and apply for the new mid-tier countryside stewardship scheme. The main difficulty in completing the application is that the Rural Payments Agency and DEFRA website is not functioning properly in relation to the new scheme.

To exacerbate the delays in moving to the new scheme, the RPA is providing little to no communication with those farmers who have queries about how to apply for the scheme, meaning that desperate constituents, trying to apply before the deadline, are contacting my office for help and support. The deadline for many is coming up in the middle of next month and I urge the Department to provide the communication and support required to help those trying to transition to the new scheme, as they have been advised to do.

This is causing great consternation for my constituency farmers and, no doubt, many other farmers up and down the country, at their busiest harvest time of year. In view of these communication problems with the RPA, will the Minister consider delaying the deadlines for applications to the mid-tier countryside stewardship scheme? That seems only fair, considering the difficulties people are having with communicating with the RPA.

In closing, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish you, Mr Speaker, colleagues, all our very hard-working staff and the hard-working staff in the House, a happy recess and a chance to recharge their batteries.

1.53 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak in this debate and to remember the late Sir David Amess, who rattled off so many issues when he used to speak in the debate. I am taking him as my inspiration for this speech, although I will not do it as fast as he would have done it.

It has been another remarkably busy Session for me and my team, and three and half years into this job, it continues to be an enormous privilege to serve the people of Putney, Roehampton, Wandsworth town and Southfields. I invite you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to join me at the Roehampton community week celebrations and events in August. It would be an honour if you can join us and it will be the highlight of the summer in my constituency.

I thank everyone involved in my Putney Gives campaign to support donations to our local foodbanks. The synagogue, the mosque, churches, schools and businesses all came together, and we donated two thirds of a tonne of much-needed food and other provisions to local people who are really struggling at this time during the summer.

I have received more than 18,500 emails from constituents since the parliamentary Session began in May last year and my hard-working team and I have sent out nearly 27,000 in reply. I thank my hard-working and caring parliamentary staff team— Matt, Dan, Mercy, Anna, Jack and Anisah—for all of their work. Together with constituents across the constituency, we are a campaigning team and I have been campaigning hard on the climate emergency; the housing crisis; cladding; discrimination; young carers; early years services; youth services; special educational needs; tackling crime; cleaning up our air; the NHS; saving bus routes; and dealing with sewage in rivers. We saved some allotments in Southfields from being developed on. We are campaigning for a lift for East Putney station. We are also seeking to reopen Hammersmith bridge—yes, it is still closed and I cannot believe it either! We need funding from the Government to reopen it. We are campaigning to stop the closure of ticket offices and to increase safe cycle lanes and cycle parking, so that more people who want to cycle in our wonderful constituency can do so. That is far from an exhaustive list.

As we close for the summer and this long Session continues, the Government continue to provide more questions than answers, so I have several issues I wish to raise today. First, I want to thank all those in NHS Supply Chain for movement on our campaign for NHS uniforms to be standardised. In the equivalent debate three years ago, I talked about Putney's Scrubbery, which, at that time, with covid hard upon us, had mobilised lots of

volunteers to make scrubs in hospitals. As they did so, they found out that the NHS scrubs were not fit for purpose: they were made for men who were much bigger than most of the staff; and they were not standardised across hospitals, which made it difficult to do laundry services and cost a lot more money. We have been campaigning on this issue. As a result, following hard work by staff at NHS Supply Chain, this has been turned around. Some 50,000 people got involved in the consultation and now uniforms that are more comfortable, fit for purpose and save money are being developed. So I am grateful to all of those who have helped with that campaign.

My next issue is probably the biggest question being asked by Putney residents at the moment: where is the Renters (Reform) Bill? Every week, with bated breath, I have looked at the Order Paper to see what is on in the next week in here, but I have never seen that Bill. Will the Minister explain at the end of this debate to the 21,000 private renters in my constituency, which has an average rent of more than £4,500 a month, where the Bill is? Why do I have to keep asking about it? Why is it taking so long?

It has been 1,500 days and four Prime Ministers since the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) first promised to scrap no-fault evictions, back in April 2019. That was announced with huge fanfare but it was never followed up. The situation is getting desperate. Since then, more than 50,000 households have been threatened with homelessness by section 21 notices. No-fault evictions are a leading cause of households approaching their councils for homelessness relief. No-fault evictions have gone up by 116% this year and, with mortgage rises being passed on by landlords, many renters are facing homelessness. I have spoken to many in the past few weeks. The Deputy Prime Minister reiterated the line at Prime Minister's questions recently that the Bill would be brought forward when parliamentary time allows. We have had plenty of parliamentary time since then, and we will probably have some more this afternoon, but we will not see the Bill this side of the summer recess, leaving renters across the country waiting yet again.

I thank all the schools in my constituency that have welcomed me to visit them. I get a lot of questions and answers—I get all sorts of questions. I am given a hard time, rightly, by lots of young people from across the constituency, but every time I talk with schools and young people they raise one issue above every other: mental health. We need to talk about child and adolescent mental health services and the long waiting lists. A quarter of a million children in the UK with mental health problems have been denied the help they need because the NHS is struggling to keep up with the demand for services. Some 95% of GPs believe that mental health services for children and young people are critically failing and have deteriorated in the past six years. Ministers have failed to deliver on parity of esteem for mental health services and children, especially, are being badly let down.

Labour has a plan for this. We will provide a specialist mental health support service in every secondary school. We will put an open-access mental health hub for children and young people in every community, providing that much-needed early intervention—prevention. We cannot wait until we are in government—we cannot wait for that—to do something about this matter. I seek

[Fleur Anderson]

a response from the Government on their solutions to this issue. They are very welcome to steal and implement Labour's plans for improving our mental health services.

My next issue is driving test waiting times. This has been concerning for many of my constituents who have been waiting an extraordinary amount of time to get their test booked. Many are unable to take up new jobs because, by the time they have managed to book a test, they have lost their job offer. That is very concerning. Recently, I had to book a test with my daughter and found that it was harder to get a test date than to get Taylor Swift or Glastonbury tickets. We woke up at 6 o'clock on a Monday morning, went online, and then found that there were 8,400 people in the queue ahead of us for the test. We had to wait half an hour for the queue to go down, and then we jumped on the last remaining test in the whole London area, which was many miles away from us in north London. This crisis is going on, and I do not think that it is being raised enough in the House, which is why I am doing so now.

In England, the average wait time for a test is 13.6 weeks. Before 2020, it was just six weeks, which is an acceptable amount of time, but waiting about six months on average is just not acceptable. In London, it is worse. Of the 26 test centres in London, 16 have wait times of 24 weeks—the average is 17 and a half weeks. In the many written parliamentary questions that I have put to the Department for Transport, I have asked exactly how long people are having to wait, how many Londoners are able to get tests in London, and what the situation is across the country. The Department could not give me information on that. Officials said that they had no data because the moving and the rebooking of tests means that they do not know when people first booked their tests. That is not good enough. If the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency does not even have the data on waiting list times, it cannot fix the problem. Will the Minister look at the system, as it really is not working at the moment, and take this matter up with the Department for Transport and the DVSA?

The next issue, which has cross-party support, is my campaign to ban plastic in wet wipes. It has come a long way and I know that Members are waiting with bated breath to find out what the next steps are. I introduced my private Member's Bill in 2021, and it was supported by Members from across the House. Billions of wet wipes are used every year, and, because they contain plastic, they do not break down, they block sewers, they add costs to our water bills and they cause environmental damage in our rivers and oceans. There was a consultation, which was great, and it ended in February last year. Suppliers, retailers and all parts of the industry are united in saying that a ban could be achieved. Tesco and Boots have led the way as retailers, banning plastic in all the wet wipes that they sell, which amounts to billions of wet wipes a year. Producers and retailers agree that a date could be set, and that they could introduce a ban. The Government's plan for water was published in April. There was the opportunity to get the ban. It included an announcement from the Government that it would be done—fantastic. So far so good, but there is no actual ban and there is no actual date. Instead, we have a promise of another consultation. I ask the Minister today: why is there another consultation; when will it be launched; and when will the actual ban come in?

I wish to finish on the climate emergency. One of the first things I did when I was elected MP for Putney was set up the Putney Environment Commission. It is a wonderful thriving group of activists and local people who want to take ownership of our local environment and tackle the climate emergency globally, nationally, locally, and in our own gardens. We held a recent meeting focused on the need to save nature, and how much of a nature-depleted country we are compared with other countries. Local people in Putney, Roehampton and Southfields see the data, they see Europe being scorched as we speak with record-breaking heat, and they see the inaction of the Government, and they are horrified. They do not want to stand by and do nothing about it.

It is not just the people of Putney who are concerned about the failure of the Conservative Government to do enough on the environment. The Climate Change Committee has highlighted 18 areas in which the Conservative Government are failing on energy and climate. Those include failure to reform the planning system to bring more home-grown power online; failure on renewables; failure on energy efficiency; failure on making new homes green; failure in comparison to other countries; failure to take global climate leadership; failure on heat pumps; failure on hydrogen for home heating; failure on the delivery of nature targets; failure to deliver on international commitments, instead going backwards; failure to grasp the opportunity to protect consumers; failure on workers and skills; failure to address the UK's second highest-emitting sector, which is buildings; and failure on fossil fuels and stopping more coal mines from being built.

The Government have failed to ensure that their own Departments, such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, meet the Committee's priorities. They have also failed on green financing, which should be underpinning all of those actions. The Government should be going further and faster on climate action. I hope there is time for reflection over the summer recess, and that action on the climate can be speeded up incredibly. We cannot wait for the Labour Government who will take that action: we need it now.

Today, there are train strikes and an NHS doctors' strike. My son graduates from university next week, but was told last week when he should have had his mark that it has not been allocated, so he will be graduating without even a mark after three difficult years at university under covid. That is because the Government have failed university staff, and are failing students. Food and housing costs are also spiralling. I cannot look back on the past 13 years without the word "failure" coming to mind. This country deserves better—Putney, Roehampton, Wandsworth town and Southfields deserve better.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish you and all Members present a restful and joyful summer. If you get the chance, do come and visit gorgeous Putney. It is a fantastic place to come in the summer, and I am so proud to be its MP.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that His Majesty has signified his Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023
 Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023
 Child Support (Enforcement) Act 2023
 Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
 Illegal Migration Act 2023
 Electronic Trade Documents Act 2023
 Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023.

Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment

Debate resumed

2.7 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): I begin by apologising to the House: as I have discussed with Madam Deputy Speaker and the Minister, I cannot remain until 5 o'clock. As a result of today's train strikes, it will take me longer to get to the airport and then back to Scotland. I appreciate their understanding of that.

I will also begin by reflecting on our late, great colleague whom this debate is named after. I was with Sir David Amess on a foreign trip less than 48 hours before he was murdered, and in many of the discussions that we had throughout the days and in the evenings—during which he led the delegation with great skill, as he always did—he mentioned how much he enjoyed this Adjournment debate, raising issues on behalf of his constituents. We can see from his contributions over the years just how passionate he was about this place, this debating Chamber and the issues he was able to highlight. It is a fitting memory of Sir David that we hold this debate at the end of each term.

The first issue I would like to raise is a national issue, and then I want to go on to more local issues in my constituency of Moray. The national issue is the news that has broken in Scotland today about Viaplay withdrawing from the UK, as referenced by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). That news has been met with a lot of concern. Understandably, people will be worried about their jobs, and they are in our thoughts at the moment—I should of course declare an interest as a football referee with the Scottish Football Association, including in the Scottish league cup this weekend, which is sponsored and broadcast by Viaplay. There are also concerns about the future of Viaplay's coverage in Scotland—its coverage of the Scottish league cup and, of course, our national games.

Members who have already raised this issue have been right to highlight that the performance of Steve Clarke and his team in recent months has been something that all of us Scottish football fans have welcomed and celebrated. We are looking forward to the qualification campaign continuing after the incredible results that we have already seen. Although the news about Viaplay is concerning, I also think it is an opportunity because, like other Members across the House, I am concerned that we cannot watch our national team—the Scottish men's team—on free-to-view TV. Despite the contract having recently been agreed between Viaplay, UEFA and the Scottish FA, there is an opportunity to review the model of delivering the national men's football games on terrestrial TV. I hope that the BBC, STV and Channel 4 look again at the offer they can make in that regard, as getting those games on free-to-air TV would be welcomed by our fans across the country.

Let me turn to some local matters. First, I want to discuss some health-related issues. I understand that health is fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government, but I am in a fortunate position in that I sit in both our Parliaments, and given that I have raised both these health issues in the Scottish Parliament, I would like to reiterate them here in the UK Parliament. The first is about access to GP surgeries.

[Douglas Ross]

There has been a significant campaign in the villages of Burghhead and Hopeman to retain the surgeries in those two coastal communities, as they are vital facilities for the people living there. The Save Our Surgeries campaign has done outstanding work to raise the issue—not just locally, but on national news too. There has been a strong outpouring of support for that campaign, with thousands signing the petition to maintain at least one of the surgeries, but the response from NHS Grampian and Health & Social Care Moray has been appalling and disgraceful, and disrespectful to the people campaigning for the surgeries' continuation.

The chief executive of NHS Grampian recently wrote to me after I raised concerns with her. She told me that part of the consultation did not include the basic question of whether the surgeries could remain open. When I highlighted that in the press, the board told me that it had missed out a word in the letter to me, which should have stated that the question was not a “main” part of the consultation. This has led many people to believe that there was never a genuine consultation to keep the surgeries in Burghhead and Hopeman open and that it had been agreed from the very beginning that they would close. However, NHS Grampian did not count on the outstanding support locally for a facility in either—but hopefully both—Burghhead or Hopeman. I will continue to support the campaign in any way I can.

The other health issue I want to raise is the future of consultant-led maternity services at Dr Gray's. It is coming up to five years since our community was told that there would be a temporary downgrade of that facility for one year. In that five-year period, my wife and I have welcomed two beautiful boys into the world, four-year-old Alistair and two-year-old James. Alistair was fortunately able to be born at Dr Gray's, but due to complications when my wife Krystle went into labour, James had to be born in Aberdeen following a blue-light journey in the back of an ambulance from Elgin. Sadly, our story and experience is shared by far too many Moray mums and families.

We have been promised time and again that the facilities will be brought back, yet we are now five years on from the original decision to downgrade it temporarily for 12 months. I welcome the fact that the new Public Health Minister has agreed to meet me, local campaigners Keep MUM and others in Moray during the summer recess to discuss this issue and to come up and see the importance of getting that full consultant-led facility open again at Dr Gray's. The situation has been going on for far too long, and I will continue to use opportunities such as this debate and others to highlight the importance of the full restoration of the service, so that we can ensure that the outstanding staff at Dr Gray's can continue to provide that high level of care as locally as they would like.

The other issue I want to raise is that of infrastructure. We have heard from other contributors about infrastructure projects, and one that I would like to focus on is the dualling of the A9, which is a critical route in Scotland that goes from the central belt through Perthshire and up to the highlands. Many of my constituents use the A9 daily or weekly to get to and from the north of Scotland.

Back in 2007, the SNP promised to fully dual the A9, but that promise has not been delivered. Indeed, this week *The Inverness Courier* hosted a summit on the dualling of the A9 that was attended by the SNP Scottish

Transport Minister. It was welcome that she travelled to Inverness to hear the concerns of local residents and campaigners, but many were left unhappy with the responses they heard. Among the comments were those of Laura Hansler, who said she does not believe that the A9 will be dualled in her lifetime. She has been campaigning because she sees daily how dangerous the road is but, given the delays we have seen under the SNP Scottish Government, she does not think the road will be fully dualled in her lifetime, despite the promise that had been made.

We also heard from Bill Lobban, the convenor of Highland Council and an independent councillor, who felt that there were no answers from the meeting. Crucially, we heard from Fergus Ewing, an SNP MSP and a former Cabinet Secretary, who said that he felt it was to his shame that there has not been enough progress on dualling the route in the time his party has been in government, and that the Minister had failed to answer the three main points and concerns that came out of the summit.

It is of real concern that although there has at least been more dialogue, there is no further action on dualling the route. We were told that when the A9 was fully dualled, the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen, which goes through my Moray constituency, would be fully dualled as well. We are no further on and, indeed, the future of the A96 dualling is now in far more doubt because the SNP brought into government the Scottish Greens, who are anti-car and anti-road building. That vital infrastructure upgrade is now under serious threat because of the Greens in government trying to stop critical networks being brought up to the level expected. Not only do my constituents want it, but businesses in Moray say that it is crucial for their future as well.

I want to stick to the time limit that has been imposed, because so many Members want to raise so many issues, but this has been a great opportunity to raise in Parliament just some of the crucial issues that I have been working on as MP for Moray and will continue to work on in the summer recess. Like others, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish you and all Members and staff all the best for the summer recess.

2.17 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I wish to speak about a number of constituency issues. First, I recently had the privilege of opening, on behalf of the company Brit European in Middlewich in my constituency, its new Vita Nova centre. Brit European started life in my constituency just under 100 years ago, with one horse-drawn milk tanker taking milk from local farms to dairy. Today, it is a leading transport logistics company with a fleet of hundreds of vehicles, provides transport solutions across the UK and into Europe, and has its own driver academy. I was so impressed with the innovative approach by Brit European—led by CEO Graham Lackey, who is supported by group sales director Rob McNinch, both of whom have travelled here to listen to this debate from the Gallery—that I want to take this opportunity to commend the company for the development of its new site. It has focused on a carbon-neutral build, working off grid and ensuring that the whole site is environmentally efficient.

Let me give some more detail. The new centre has repurposed an existing steel-frame building from elsewhere for the company's modular building, while the driver

welfare facilities, workshops, IT facilities and parts stores are all made from repurposed shipping containers. The entire site of 5.5 acres is built on a redesigned concrete slab that is 33% thinner than normal concrete foundations and has hugely reduced the carbon footprint for the whole build. Ground stabilisation techniques were used in construction to avoid digging into the ground, thereby avoiding the need to remove soil, dump it off site and replace it with quarried materials. This alone saved thousands of transported truckloads of materials.

Focusing on off grid, the Vita Nova site has a full solar array and battery power storage system, and innovative wind towers are planned that are quieter and less obtrusive than traditional large windmill turbines. Remarkably, they have been 3D-printed using recycled plastic on site, so again avoiding transport, and with no concrete foundations, they can easily be moved. They are the first of their kind in England.

Colloquially called “moo poo”, methane captured from dairy farms’ slurry pits is being used to charge Brit European’s vehicles. This is 84 times better than releasing a kilogram of methane into the atmosphere, and is another world first. The rainwater harvesting system provides 85% of the site’s total water needs and is used for flushing toilets and vehicle washing, and none of the water that falls within the site can run off to the surrounding environment without being cleaned via filter tanks. In a final stage of off-grid development, Brit European is developing software and a switching system to co-ordinate all power generation, so that at any point in time it is using the most environmentally beneficial energy source available. In other words, it links the solar, wind, moo poo and battery systems together and utilises the energy they produce before going to grid.

The whole build is on a brownfield area, so the company worked with environmental experts to come up with a planting scheme to restore the site to its pre-industrial state. It is believed the site was first industrialised in the late 1800s. Work includes carefully selected trees and shrubs, bat and bird boxes, and measures to encourage animals such as hedgehogs.

Even more admirable is Brit European’s generous offer through the Road Haulage Association to pass on this innovation to other transport or logistics businesses across the country. This exemplary innovation has not been easy, but when Graham Lackey is asked why he has done this, he replies, “To reach sustainability as a business is simply the right thing to do, for my children and their future.” It gives me great pleasure to commend Brit European’s innovative work today. I am very proud to have such a forward-looking company in my constituency.

Elsewhere in my constituency are the steep inclines of Mow Cop. Will the Government consider improving the guidance for local authorities on winter gritting? On Mow Cop, there are several rural roads that are not gritted in the winter and can therefore be impassable for vehicles in the winter months, leading to more traffic on the remaining open roads, preventing safe access by emergency services, stopping social care workers visiting elderly members of the rural population and children going to and from school on local authority transport, and cutting off those who live in our rural settlements. As Councillor Patrick Redstone, who has long been campaigning for better gritting on Mow Cop, says, these roads are not mere “rat runs”; they are, as one of

my constituents called them, arteries of the rural community. Will the Government review the current guidance for local authorities on winter gritting, with a view to strengthening local council obligations?

Another company in my constituency is SpanSet Ltd, which has been manufacturing there for over 50 years. This progressive international company wants to invest in solar energy generation at its factory site, but its plans have been halved by the local electricity network’s operators restrictions. The issue relates to the capacity of network infrastructure to receive back any excess energy generated. SpanSet is asking why, at a time when renewable energy generation and reducing energy imports are so important, the system disincentivises local network operators supporting companies that want to invest in green energy and even forces them to reduce or vetoes schemes. As this is a technical question, I ask the Minister responding to today’s debate to support my request for a meeting between SpanSet and someone from the Department for Business and Trade to discuss the matter further.

Next, I join constituents in objecting to the proposed closure of Congleton station’s ticket office. As one constituent writes:

“The service provided for all customers, especially the disabled, is essential for the safety of all”.

Another says:

“This is unacceptable as the ticket office is always busy—at times the queue can be outside the door—and the staff are very helpful.”

Last but by no means least, I have campaigned in this House for many years on family hubs, and I was delighted when the Government provided money for them across the country. I commend New Life church in Congleton for the holistic support it offers individuals and families, young and old—including a food bank, running parenting courses, providing job and benefits support, offering mental health support and much more. In the light of these services, New Life church should be recognised as a family hub, or at the very least as a spoke of a family hub. Some time ago, I took representatives from Cheshire East Council to New Life, and no one could fail to be impressed by the work that is going on with families. Since then, discussions have been ongoing for some time between Cheshire East Council officers and others for New Life to be formally recognised as at least a family hub spoke. May I use this debate to urge Cheshire East Council to make a decision, award funding to New Life and grant it spoke status?

Before I close, may I just put on record my deepest thanks to my parliamentary assistant Chloe Black? She has worked for me for many years and provided exemplary service, and I wish her all the best as she embarks on her new career as a geography teacher.

2.26 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): As we all do today, I rise with Sir David Amess in my heart and in my thoughts. He was a great friend—a cheeky friend—and mentor to so many of us.

I am very fortunate to represent the amazing communities of Rutland and Melton, the Vale and Harborough villages, which cover 187 villages, three towns and 431 square miles. Within my constituency, we have the Hallaton hoard of Roman gold and the Stilton pork pie. I promised all Members that much would be heard of that during

[Alicia Kearns]

my time in Parliament, and I would say that I have lived up to that commitment. We also have Burrough on the Hill, where there was a great Roman fort. We have the Rutland sea dragon, otherwise known as the ichthyosaur. I put on record that it is not a dinosaur, but a marine animal of some sort. We also have the Belvoir elderflower cordial, the Rutland mosaic, which has changed our understanding of Roman history, and the beautiful Belvoir castle, where “The Crown” is filmed. This is an incredible group of communities to represent, and I am so pleased to be here and to speak about some of the campaigns on which I have been working on their behalf.

I am also delighted to see the Minister, the Vice-Chamberlain of His Majesty’s Household, on the Front Bench for this debate, and look forward to hearing her voice filling the Chamber once again.

Earlier this year—and I know that the world and the media were very keen to talk about this—we were successful in our bid to secure £23 million from the levelling-up fund for the communities of Rutland and Melton. Many asked, “Why did Rutland and Melton deserve those funds?” The answer is that we have two of the worst places in the country for social mobility. That means that when people have difficult lives, it is far more difficult for them to create the future that they and their family want—that most Conservative of values—with a determination to get better education and better opportunities. I am therefore incredibly excited that we are moving forward with this levelling-up funding.

The priority now is making sure that we can get everything in place to meet the deadlines we have set. As a result, we will build the Borough market of the midlands in Melton Mowbray, as well as an entire new tourism offer within Rutland. We will build a medical hub, which will design the technologies of the future to support our loved ones to live for longer. That includes informing people when their elderly loved ones are dehydrated and need to be given tablets to swallow, or if they have had a heart attack or fallen down the stairs. That will attract medical talent to Rutland and give us first access to those technologies. We will finally build an older people’s medical technology hub in the UK.

In the long term, we need more beyond this immediate cash injection. I am talking about fair funding. I have touched on the need to insert social mobility, a core Conservative value, into the way we fund local government. I know it is unlikely that the funding formulas will get the overhaul this country needs, but I met the Chancellor yesterday and am working to see if we can get social mobility included alongside deprivation in the funding formula. That would better recognise that sometimes, in the most deprived areas in our country, people still have access to a jobcentre or to employment or training opportunities within a 10-minute walk. When you see rural poverty, Mr Deputy Speaker, it stays with you and you do not forget it, because those individuals may not have access to buses or petrol for their cars, nor the ability to go to shops or medical care or anything else. That is why I am fighting to put social mobility into our funding formulas.

On the streets of Rutland and Melton, the most common issue raised with me is healthcare. I am therefore delighted that the £1.5 million refurbishment of Rutland Memorial Hospital was completed in March—it is looking

wonderful—and that the £450 million for Leicester hospitals is going ahead, but there is more to be done. I have secured agreement for the first MRI scanner ever to be positioned in Rutland, and I am now working to get the final funding put in place by the Government, so I am grateful to them. As part of that, I am working to get Medbourne GP practice reopened. We need it up and running and in that community spoke—it is important.

A wider concern that I have about healthcare in our area is that I have recently identified that access to community paediatricians is far below what it should be. In Melton, the maximum wait is 102 weeks, and in Rutland it is 106 weeks for a child to see a paediatrician to get support. That is not good enough, and I will be working to see what we can do.

On national healthcare, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) for meeting my constituent Phil Newby, who went to the High Court for the right to end his own life because of the appalling conditions in which he has to live. I was grateful to my hon. Friend for ensuring that private meeting, so that Phil could give evidence before he potentially loses the ability to speak.

I am also delighted that working with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden), who has become a good friend across the aisle, we have secured a right to protect the rights of loved ones to have visitors when they are in hospital, following my campaign during the pandemic to make sure that partners are never locked out again. I am delighted that we have secured that national change.

As a rural constituency, travel continues to be a major issue in Rutland and Melton, but after 40 years—some say 50 or 60 years—I have finally delivered the Melton Mowbray distributor road. The bypass is in the ground, the spades are there and it is being built. We are meeting deadline after deadline. People said it would never happen, but it is happening and people can see it all around them. It is such good news.

I am still working to secure more progress on the A1. It has one of the worst accident records in the UK. I have secured six substantial safety upgrades to the A1, all of which are now complete. I, too, suffered the pain of driving up and down as it was closed over the past few months, but we got the security and safety upgrades that we needed. I have also noticed a big uptick in littering and fly-tipping along the A1, which is deeply disappointing. I am pleased that we have secured the increase in fly-tipping fines that many of us have been fighting for. I hope those fines start to be used.

Turning to Bottesford in the north of my constituency, we have made some progress at the A52 junction. I know it is not enough, but we will be getting vehicle-activated speed signs early next year, and that is progress. I brought National Highways to Bottesford. It met my constituents, and I am disappointed that it is still not willing to do the full junction renovations that we need, but we are making progress.

On education, it has been a big year for Rutland. We have secured regeneration funding for 11 schools across my constituency and, following the biggest increase in funding for education announced the other day by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we will now see £75 million put into education across Rutland and Melton, and that is absolutely right. I pay tribute to the

staff and, in particular, the headteacher, Carl, at Casterton College. They recently saw an appalling incident where, following storms, much of the building collapsed. We had fortunately already secured it a place in the school rebuilding programme, and following that incident we have a timeline with delivery in 2025, which is fantastic news.

I was pleased to host my first annual parish and town council summits over the past year. They were a chance to hear from local communities and local people who know what local people want. As part of that, we have been fighting for funds from the community ownership fund. I am delighted that four out of four applications were successful in Rutland and Melton: the Black Horse at Grimston, the Barrowden village hall, the Bell at Frisby, which is doing amazingly, and the hub at Thurnby, where we broke ground a few months ago. It is fantastic to see local communities getting the investment they need to build community spaces.

While I am on communities, I will mention the amazing charity For Rutland. It raises funds every year to fund specialist advisers for our citizens advice bureau. Elizabeth Mills and Trish Ruddle are sweethearts of Rutland and absolute heroes. People book tickets over a year in advance for the For Rutland charity clothes sale, travelling from as far as Edinburgh and Cornwall to take part, so I thank them for all they do.

I will move quickly through my final points. I am delighted that in the Oakham Heights estate, we have finally managed to get residents on the board, and there will be a full handover of the estate to residents. We fought to make sure that local people had a say.

I continue my campaign against the Mallard Pass solar plant in my constituency, and the Government know that I will be tabling two new clauses to the Energy Bill: the first is to rip out Uyghur slave labour solar panels, and the second is to ensure that we do not build on the best and most versatile land of grade 3a and above, and that 3b land continues to be seen as such.

I turn to casework and the silent victories MPs have that few people ever hear about. My team and I have supported almost 6,000 residents since last September, receiving a staggering 13,000 emails, and I am delighted that we continue to have wins for people who come to us in their darkest days, when every other door has been closed in their face. I pay tribute in particular to my extraordinary senior caseworker, Lisa, who will fight and fight until she gets people the outcomes they deserve and makes their voices heard, and to Emma, who supports her and ran an incredible matching service for Ukrainian refugees last year, through which we helped over 400 families find a home here in the UK.

I reiterate my thanks to the entire House for its support in electing me as Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. It has been an enormous privilege and joy. It is so important to have the opportunity to bring forward important pieces of work, such as our recent report on hostage taking. We will soon publish reports on the Wagner network and our Indo-Pacific inquiry. I thank the Clerks of the Committee, Chris, Medha, Johnny, Sasha, Ken, Ashlee, Daniela, Lucy, Hannah, Clare, Toni and those I may have forgotten, as well as David Clark in the Speaker's Office, who has been a steadfast support to me.

I also pay tribute to Alison and Ted and all the security team of the House, who are often forgotten but who have been incredibly helpful to me over the last

year in the face of significant challenges. I thank them for all they do to keep the House safe, as well as Mr Speaker and his family.

I will wrap up by saying an enormous thank you to my team. Without them, I would be lost and would not have the joy that we sometimes forget to find in this role. These are people who stand by and truly believe in the communities we fight for and communities around the world such as those in the Balkans, Ukraine and beyond. I thank Lisa, Emma, Alex, Amelia and Harry, and I wish everyone a wonderful summer recess.

2.37 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I am honoured to speak in the Sir David Amess Adjournment debate, which the House kindly agreed some time ago to name in memory of our great friend. We still miss him, and I must confess that I do in particular—especially that famous cheeky Amess grin. I reassure the House that I am not going to try to emulate him and raise 20 different topics in half as many minutes. Nevertheless, there are five particular areas that I would like to touch on before the House adjourns for the summer.

First, as those who were here at Education questions on Monday may recall, I have launched a campaign for a new special needs school in south Essex. We already have a number of very good special needs schools in Essex, but they are now—almost without exception—heavily over-subscribed, and we simply do not have enough special needs places, particularly in the south of the county, to deal with ever increasing demand. As a result, many parents end up having to go through long appeals processes, desperately trying to get their children into an appropriate school. For those who are unsuccessful, their children are shoehorned into mainstream education, which sometimes leads to behavioural problems and even to mainstream schools themselves getting bad Ofsted reports as a result.

We need to cut through this Gordian knot and expand capacity. I am therefore talking to the cabinet member for education and lifelong learning in Essex County Council, Councillor Tony Ball, as well as Ministers at the Department for Education and a couple of local multi-academy trusts, to see whether we can find a suitable option to open a new school. I hope to have more to say about that by the time the House returns in the autumn, but for the moment I pledge to do my best on this. In that, I hope I will have the support of my constituents, especially parents with special needs children.

Secondly, we have had real problems at King Edmund School in Ashingdon, which suffered a triple whammy. First, it was closed like many other schools during covid, and secondly, it had to have a large block demolished because of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, or RAAC. The third whammy came when they demolished the building and found that it contained a large quantity of asbestos, which no one realised was there. The school had to be completely closed while the area was thoroughly decontaminated. I am glad to report to the House that the new block is now in the early stages of rising phoenix-like from the ashes. I thank the permanent secretary at the Department for Education, who at a recent meeting of the Public Accounts Committee publicly apologised to me and my constituents who were adversely affected by this difficult situation. I am assured by the headteacher, Mr Jonathan Osborn, that the apology has

[Mr Mark Francois]

gone down very well with staff, parents and pupils alike, so I want to register my thanks this afternoon on their behalf.

On a related matter, Hockley Primary School has also unfortunately been discovered to be suffering from RAAC. Having recently checked with the Academies Enterprise Trust, which runs the school, it is in the midst of a detailed engineering survey, assisted by the Department, to assess the extent of the problem. In the meantime, other AET schools in the Hockley area, including Plumberow and Greensward, have rallied round to provide alternative places for Hockley schoolchildren.

We await the results of the engineering survey with great interest, but I am doing everything I can in the meantime to facilitate the provision at least of temporary classrooms for the autumn term on the Hockley Primary School site itself. If that cannot be achieved—I very much hope it can—I will work with AET to ensure that there is some kind of plan B, perhaps continuing to use some of the nearby schools.

Thirdly, we have a very unfortunate situation in Wickford, whereby both the town's main supermarkets are closed pending redevelopment, and the old market in Wickford High Street has had to close and is looking for an alternative venue. Many other Members wish to speak today, so to cut a very long story short, my Wickford constituents have been left facing something of a perfect storm regarding their ability to shop locally. I am doing everything I can to persuade Basildon Council to find a new site, even a temporary one, to allow Wickford market to reopen, and also to persuade Aldi, which is in the process of rebuilding and expanding its supermarket in Wickford, to keep to its ambitious timetable and make sure that the store is open before Christmas this year.

My Wickford constituents are also frustrated by the fact that Abellio Greater Anglia knocked down half their train station without having a proper plan to rebuild it. I have raised this issue with Abellio on multiple occasions, and I now understand it is close to submitting a planning application for a new station design to Basildon Council this summer, which would hopefully allow construction to begin sometime next year. It is important that Abellio keeps to that timetable, and I intend to remain very much on its case until it does so.

That leads me on to the related matter of ticket offices, not just in Wickford, but at all the other stations in my constituency. I fully intend to respond to the consultation about proposals to close ticket offices prior to the deadline next week, but suffice it to say at this juncture that I am opposed to the proposals, which are a mistake. The savings that might be generated from doing so are more than outweighed by the potential inconvenience for travellers, particularly those who are visually impaired or otherwise disabled. The other Monday morning when I was waiting on the platform at Rayleigh station, I even saw that—lo and behold—the ticket machine was not working. In short, I believe the game is not worth the candle. I very much hope that Ministers—including the rail Minister, who is a decent chap and to whom I spoke personally about this recently—and the train operators might yet be persuaded to reconsider.

Fourthly, I want to raise some issues relating to sheltered housing accommodation in my constituency. Some in the House with good memories might remember my previously referring to a sheltered housing scheme known as Sangster Court—also known as “Gangster Court”—in Rayleigh, run by Notting Hill Genesis. Such has been my frustration with NHG over the years that, in the last Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate, on 21 July last year, I said in the House:

“I can only express the hope that Notting Hill Genesis will soon be overtaken by a larger and more professional housing association that will do a much better job for my constituents.”—*[Official Report, 21 July 2022; Vol. 718, c. 1178.]*

I was therefore delighted to receive a letter only yesterday from Mr Matthew Cornwall-Jones, the group director of assets and sustainability for NHG, confirming that it now intends to sell on the sheltered accommodation it currently owns in Essex, including in my Rayleigh and Wickford constituency. I am not sure whether that will be met with joyous rejoicing in Sangster Court, but it was certainly met with approval in my office yesterday. I very much hope we will be able to find another major social housing provider, such as perhaps Sanctuary, which has had its own issues but is now gradually improving, to take over NHG's properties in Essex and run them more successfully.

In addition, I have had some dreadful experiences with a property management company called FirstPort, which manages a number of privately run sheltered housing facilities in my constituency. Ironically, as part of its branding, it claims to “prioritise customer service”—well, you could have fooled me! For instance, at King Georges Court in Rayleigh it took FirstPort more than seven months to fix a lift. Partly as a result, some very ill elderly residents had to be carried down flights of steps by ambulance paramedics, who were doing their best, because the lift was not working. I am glad to report to the House that the lift is now finally functioning again, but FirstPort could hardly have made a worse job of it if it had tried. The concept of any sense of urgency seems totally alien to it.

Furthermore, FirstPort runs another facility called Oak Lodge in Hockley, which I visited recently at the invitation of the residents, only to see a number of maintenance defects, including a back fence that was effectively falling down and had not been repaired despite multiple complaints by the residents. Incidentally, they were also upset by increases in their bills, especially their energy bills, which they regarded as completely disproportionate. FirstPort is particularly poor at replying to correspondence, including from Members of Parliament. I put on record today that I very much hope it will follow Notting Hill Genesis's example and hand its homes over to someone more competent to run them. I do not know what the non-executive directors of FirstPort do all day, but holding the company's executive directors properly to account does not exactly seem to be their top priority.

Fifthly, everyone who knew Sir David is well aware that he was a great animal lover, so it is partly in his memory that I am supporting the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation's “The Crate Escape” campaign to phase out the use of cruel farrowing crates for sows and their piglets—and the sooner the better. Sir David was very keen on this issue, and I hope and believe that we will get there in the end.

Lastly, Mr Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank you, all our colleagues, all the staff of the House, my excellent Westminster team, Adele, Oliver, Felix and Mellissa, and all my supporters in my constituency. I hope they all have a relaxing summer recess and that we can all reassemble safely in the autumn. I thank the House.

2.48 pm

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con): This is the second time I have spoken in this debate. The first time was two years ago, and I followed David Amess—I can even remember where he was sitting in the Chamber at the time. I have refreshed my memory on what I said in that debate. I raised for the first time the issue of improved public transport links north from Newbury up to Oxford, and specifically the need for a new bus route that would link Newbury to the towns and the science parks up what we call the “knowledge highway” of the A34. I am delighted that two years later, after countless surveys, leaflets, emails to constituents, meetings with Ministers, and meetings with Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire Council and various bus companies, the new X34 bus route will open on Monday. I want to say how grateful I am to the Government for the £2.6 million bus service improvement plan funding that was given to West Berkshire Council in recognition of the fact that rural areas are often not well connected, and I also want to put on record my thanks to Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire Council and Thames Travel for taking the rare and unusual step of creating a new bus route that crosses two counties.

Since it is perfectly obvious that this debate actually works, it seems as good a time as any for me to raise my next infrastructure campaign, which is for a bridge over the level crossing, or at least some part of the adjacent railway line, in Thatcham. That may sound like a small issue, but what is in fact a significant signalling problem causes residents of that town extensive delays at peak times every single day. Many of my constituents say that they wait between 45 minutes and an hour per journey when travelling to and from work. I dread to think how many hours are lost to them each day.

I have already met the Transport Secretary to discuss the problem, and I am grateful for his support so far—although I have not asked him for any money yet and I will visit the site and meet the signalling team tomorrow. My constituency predecessor, now Lord Benyon, made some initial efforts, and has told me that, if nothing else, he can explain to me where the plan to build a bridge went wrong in the past. However, I think that there are sensible, practical solutions to the infrastructure blockage problem, and I know that the magic of this debate means that the bridge will be built very soon.

I want to raise, briefly, two further issues. Another campaign that I have been running for about two years involves the waiting times faced by families seeking a diagnosis of either autism spectrum disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder from the West Berkshire child and adolescent mental health service. When I became the local MP, the waiting time was frequently as long as three years, and I heard heartbreaking stories about children who were unable to access the curriculum, or were experiencing serious social difficulties and in some instances were not even at school.

I think that every family in my constituency who is affected by that is well aware that I have been campaigning to bring waiting times down to a 12-month maximum.

We have had a great deal of support from the Government: in 2021, West Berkshire CAMHS received an additional £1.6 million to reduce waiting times and, as a result, it was able, over time, to recruit 27 more healthcare professionals. It set itself a firm target of seeing all children seeking an autism diagnosis within two years by March this year. It is currently 96% of the way towards meeting that: only a handful of cases are taking longer than that. However, in the most recent phone call I received from the service, I was told that the 12-month target was still a challenge because of an 84% increase in the number of children being referred for autism diagnoses. At this stage, it is not clear to the service or to me why that is the case, but it will obviously require more attention. The present approach is to triage the children with the highest need so that they do not wait any longer than a year, but I am determined to drive down overall waiting times to a year for all those families. I will continue my campaign to achieve that and will seek assistance from Ministers as to how it can be done.

Finally, I want to say something about water quality. My area is covered by Thames Water, which has, I have to say, been working with me constructively since the implementation of the Environment Act 2021. Three chalk streams run through my constituency, and Thames Water pledged that this summer it would produce a wastewater management plan setting out how it would achieve an 80% reduction in the use of storm overflows into the chalk streams by 2030. That was a firm commitment.

While I was keen to work with the water company, I also wrote to Ofwat on 25 May asking whether it would consider tying bonus payments and shareholder dividends to environmental performance. I did not mean that in a discretionary sense. I suggested that, if any water company is fined for illegal discharges, it should be mandated that it does not pay bonuses to senior managers or dividends to shareholders and that, given that bankers lose their bonuses if they break the law, so should water company executives. I received an encouraging response from Ofwat, but it is not really a matter of dispute that Thames Water is in a state of flux, with the resignation of its chief executive officer, and we do not know what its future holds. I put it on the record that when Parliament returns I hope that we will have much greater clarity on the future of Thames Water, and that we can continue to work constructively, both through what I hope will be the publication of its wastewater management plan and through tougher sanctions implemented by Ofwat to ensure that we get there.

2.55 pm

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): I join colleagues in paying tribute to our late friend Sir David Amess. I was lucky enough to be put by the accommodation Whip on the same corridor as Sir David when I first arrived here as an MP. I will never forget the conversations that we used to have while waiting for the lifts in 1 Parliament Street, which never work. He was always interested in colleagues and what they were doing. He took a genuine interest in parliamentarians and this House. We really miss him and remember him in these times. On a happier note, I extend my good wishes to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and all the staff in the Houses of Parliament in advance of the summer recess, and wish them a very restful recess.

I am told by *Hansard* that today will be my 170th mention of Carshalton and Wallington, so no prizes for guessing the topic of my speech today. I will highlight a few

[Elliot Colburn]

things that my constituents are facing, which I hope that the Minister, who I am delighted is in her place, will take away to the relevant Government Departments to pursue over the summer. I do not think that it will come as any surprise that the No. 1 issue that I get from residents on the doorstep and in my postbag—I am sure it is the same for every Member of Parliament at the moment—is concern about cost of living pressures, such as meeting the mortgage, rent payments, energy bills and other bills. I warmly welcome not only all the initiatives that the Government have taken, including the energy bill relief scheme, the household support fund, and the uprating of benefits and pensions in line with inflation, but the way the Government have tried to promote those schemes.

I know so many people who have benefited from going on the Help for Households website. They have found support that they did not know was out there. I have been trying to work alongside local stakeholders to ensure that people are adequately signposted to the support available. Together with the Department for Work and Pensions and the local jobcentre, we have set up monthly drop-in cost of living advice sessions in Roundshaw and St Helier, and we are looking to expand that to other areas of Carshalton and Wallington, particularly areas of deprivation where the need for such support is acute. Those sessions have been so well received. Every month, more and more people come to those drop-in events. I hope that the Government can encourage the DWP to continue to do that in other constituencies, because it has worked particularly well in mine.

I move on to some news that I was sad to receive yesterday: the Environment Agency is about to issue an intention to approve the increase in the amount of waste that the incinerator in Beddington can burn. The incinerator was approved—championed, in fact—by the Liberal Democrats. I am not surprised that once again none of them could be bothered to turn up today. The Lib Dem-run council has again let down residents of Carshalton and Wallington regarding this monstrosity of an incinerator, which was forced on residents against their will. We were told at the time, “This will be it. No need to worry—of course it’s not going to burn more and more waste.” This extra capacity is not needed. It can burn the household waste from the four boroughs that it receives waste from at the moment absolutely fine without needing to increase capacity. I would like the Government to again look at the permit variation processes for incinerators. If the permitted amount of incineration in this country were built, we would have more than double the Government’s own estimated need for incineration. It is not conducive to our net zero ambitions. We need to look at why we have massive overcapacity in the planning system for incineration. I hope that the Government will continue to look at that in detail.

Next, I come to what is no doubt the issue of the hour in London, and in the Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election: ULEZ. We inner and outer London MPs bang on about ULEZ, but it is important to continue raising the issue. I cannot overstate the damage that ULEZ will do to businesses, to the poorest and to charities in my constituency, and across the whole of Greater London and outside it. I am thinking particularly of those constituencies in which people do not have the

right to vote to get rid of the man who is imposing ULEZ on us: the Mayor of London. He has the audacity to say that people should get out of their cars and on to public transport, yet in my constituency he has scrapped the Go Sutton bus and the Tramlink extension. He has announced the new superloop—in my constituency, that is just a reannouncement of a bus route that has been there for over a decade. He has announced no new services whatsoever. There is nothing coming to help people make that transition to public transport; there is absolutely no support in place. In central London, he is cutting the historic No. 11 bus route, and the scrappage scheme has proved an absolute flop.

I welcome the fact that the Government have a very strong line on ULEZ, but we should continue to make it absolutely clear that it should not go ahead. I look forward to hearing the judgment of the judicial review, hopefully by the end of the month.

In the time left to me, I would quickly like to touch on education, an area of particular concern for my constituents. We have some of the best schools in the country; they feature in the top 10 schools for grade results every single year, and the teachers in my constituency do an absolutely fabulous job, day in, day out. I am absolutely thrilled that the Government have recognised that, and awarded a record funding increase of nearly £110 million to schools in Carshalton and Wallington. That is incredibly welcome.

In order to give all our young people the best start in life, could I encourage the Government to continue looking into the issue of childcare? The reforms that have been made are absolutely welcome, but there is certainly more to do. We on the Women and Equalities Committee can tell the Government that childcare issues adversely affect women in particular, as it is almost always women who bear the brunt of them. We hope that the Government will look to go further in their childcare reforms, but I welcome the efforts made so far.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) mentioned special educational needs in her speech. I join her in urging the Government to go further and faster with their ambitions to bring down waiting times for an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis, because the waiting times are completely out of control. In my constituency, many families who cannot afford to be being forced to go private to get a diagnosis. Of course, under the Children and Families Act 2014, a diagnosis is supposedly not needed to get an education, health and care plan, but almost entirely, children are being refused EHCPs unless they have one. We are up against a brick wall, to be honest, when it comes to dealing with child and adolescent mental health services in my constituency. I am sure that it is the same across the country.

I know that the Government, and in particular the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), are grasping the issue with both hands, and are very keen to get it sorted. I welcome that, and I wish the Under-Secretary every success, but I hope that the Government can come back to us in the autumn with a more fleshed-out action plan for getting waiting times down, and allowing children to fulfil their potential.

I want to touch on policing, as I am sure many colleagues will. Historically, my quiet corner of south London has been known as one of the safer boroughs

of London. The London Boroughs of Sutton and of Richmond upon Thames are often in competition with each other to be the safest London borough to live in. However, post pandemic, there seems to have been a concerning increase in what some might view as low-level crime, but it is truly worrying to the people who experience it. I cannot begin to say how many times, as I am scrolling on Facebook or Nextdoor in particular, I see Ring doorbell footage of people going up and down residential streets at night, trying car doors and front doors—not always with success, but their doings are often linked to crimes elsewhere in the area.

I welcome that the Met has now changed its approach and agreed to attend every single call-out for burglary, for example. That has resulted in several thousand additional arrests in London for this crime and that is to be welcomed. I hope that the Home Secretary will be able to reiterate our ambition to bring down crime. I am very supportive of the Met's action plan for London, but we do need a police and crime commissioner for London who gets that and wants to tackle that. We do not have that with our current Mayor, so I sincerely hope that Londoners will see fit to get rid of this failing Mayor in a year's time.

Let me finish up on the NHS. As someone who has worked in the NHS, who was born at St Helier Hospital in south London, and whose life was saved not once but twice by the staff at St Helier, I thank the Government—truly—and say how grateful I am that they have listened to NHS staff and agreed that St Helier Hospital not only has to stay, but needs that additional investment to improve the hospital, because it is in a dire state of disrepair at the moment. That has now been delivered. On top of that, there is an agreement to deliver a second hospital in Sutton, to protect A&E and maternity in the London Borough of Sutton and also to increase the amount of services that our local NHS provides, including, importantly, introducing cancer surgery. This is as a result of a brand-new partnership with the Royal Marsden Hospital, which we are so lucky to have in Sutton. This means that cancer patients living in Sutton will no longer have to go to Chelsea to get their cancer surgery. This is fantastic news for local patients and I commend the Government for doing that. We look forward to seeing some enabling works taking place this year, and to getting spades in the ground very shortly.

Finally, I echo the calls to thank our staff who put up with so much. They are often on the frontline, dealing with all of the abuse and all of the casework that comes in. They truly are to be commended for what they do. I thank Andy, Harry, Dan, Erik, Jo, Lynne, Max and Archie, who are my amazing team and who do so much to support me. They are just as dedicated to Carshalton and Wallington, and I really want to wish them all the best for the summer recess as well. Thank you very much for your time, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the staff of the House for everything they do for us. I wish everyone a happy summer.

3.7 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): I rise to pay tribute to Sir David, who was a good friend and a guiding hand to many of us elected in 2019.

As this debate is dedicated to Sir David Amess, who shared with me a deep love of animals, I want to put on the record my thanks to those thousands of people who voted for my Jack Russell, Clemmie, who secured second

place in last year's Westminster Dog of the Year competition. Now, Clemmie is going all out this year to secure the top dog title in the Sir David Amess public vote award, just as his beloved Vivienne did in 2021.

Let me turn now to serious matters. Darlington is at the forefront of our ambitious levelling up agenda and the past years have been hugely exciting for Darlington as we continue to go from strength to strength. Through covid and the current cost of living crisis, together with other funding, Darlington has received around £670 million in investment and support from the Government since I was elected in 2019. We are already seeing what that investment is delivering, such as the £23.3 million from the towns fund, which is improving our historic yards, Victoria Road and Northgate. Work has begun on the £139 million redevelopment of Bank Top Station. In that vein, I urge London North Eastern Railway not to close our ticket office in Darlington, which would hugely undermine this investment and make life more difficult for my disabled and elderly constituents.

As we approach the bicentenary of the passenger railway in 2025, Darlington's rail heritage quarter is starting to take shape, with £35 million of investment from Ben Houchen and Darlington Borough Council. I am determined that our celebration of this significant milestone should be commensurate with its importance. The eyes of the world will be on Darlington and it is a perfect opportunity to showcase our nation's rich rail heritage. I have already met Ministers and Network Rail to discuss the celebrations and I am looking forward to meeting Sir Peter Hendy to discuss how we can make them a real success.

I am delighted that a permanent location at Brunswick Street has been chosen for the Darlington economic campus, where more than 80% of the new jobs that have come to Darlington are going to local people from the region, allowing people to stay local but go far.

Connectivity in Darlington is not just about the railways, and I continue to press on several important transport issues for my constituents. Pushing for a northern link road between junction 59 on the A1 and Great Burdon on the A66 to alleviate the congestion faced by constituents in the north of Darlington is high on my agenda. I am delighted to see the Chamber so full for this debate, because immediately after it I will be presenting a petition on car parking charges in Darlington. I encourage Members to stay for that. We have also faced serious issues with buses, and I continue to press Arriva to maintain its current services in Darlington, on which some of the most vulnerable people in my community depend.

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their communities, and I have done much work in this place to ensure that is the case in Darlington. We have secured more than £1 million from the safer streets fund, which is having a huge impact on making our town centre safer. As a town with a thriving night time economy, that is of great importance. Part of that funding was used to open Number Forty, on Skinnergate, which provides a safe space for people on a night out.

Off-road bikes have long been a cause for concern in Darlington, and I have raised the issue many times in the House. I praise Durham constabulary's Operation Endurance, which is focused on tackling the scourge of off-road bikes. I am pleased to say that it is starting to have an appreciable impact, but I will continue to

[Peter Gibson]

campaign for further steps to tackle the problem in Darlington. As part of that we must improve 101 response times—something I am pleased that Rob Potts, the Conservative candidate for Durham police and crime commissioner, has committed to. I look forward to campaigning with him to help deliver vital improvements.

Education is our silver bullet to ensure that every child has the best start in life and is able to achieve their full potential. I welcome the Government's decision to offer teachers a 6.5% pay rise. The announcement of a new special school for Darlington will be hugely beneficial. The additional provision of 48 places for children with special educational needs in Darlington is much needed.

My reading lobster, Seb, has had a busy year meeting many parliamentarians, including the Prime Minister and Mr Speaker himself. The Skerne Park Academy reading lobster scheme is hugely admirable, helping to inspire a lifelong love of reading in children.

Darlington College is now delivering T-levels, and I was delighted to be at the opening of the brand-new engineering block, the Ingenium centre, along with the Secretary of State for Education. The centre has been delivered with £2.96 million of funding that we secured from the towns fund. Such new opportunities for local people in Darlington will enable them to fully reach their potential and find good, well-paid and secure employment into the future.

I have almost completed at least one visit to every school in Darlington—I have visited some of them many times—and I look forward to visiting the last two remaining on the list in September. In a similar vein, I continue to make progress on my visits to all faith establishments across the town.

I have a long connection to the hospice sector—I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—having served as a trustee for a hospice in Northallerton for more than a decade. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on hospice and end of life care, I have had the platform to raise the concerns of this vital sector over the past few months. I have been pleased to bring together all the Tees valley MPs on a cross-party basis to stand up for our Tees valley hospices and call on our local integrated care board to properly fund them. I will always continue to push for further support and recognition of these important organisations, such as St Teresa's in Darlington, which do so much good work.

Monday marked 10 years since we legalised same-sex marriages. We should be incredibly proud of the progress we have made and how far we have come on LGBT equality. I welcome the progress that we have been making towards our ambition to end new HIV transmissions by 2030. Rolling out opt-out testing to areas of high prevalence would be a huge boon in our fight against the virus, and I again call on the Government to make that happen. It would be a win-win—for public health and the public purse.

I very much welcome this week's publication of the Etherton review and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's apology from the Dispatch Box yesterday. I also call on the Government to bring forward swiftly a trans-inclusive conversion therapy ban, for which we have been waiting far too long. We must stamp out this form of abuse.

Alicia Kearns: As my hon. Friend knows, I raised this issue at Prime Minister's questions only yesterday. I have to admit that, to my great frustration, I was not particularly delighted by the Prime Minister's answer. On 19 January on the Floor of this House, at the Dispatch Box, and again in a written ministerial statement, the Secretary of State confirmed that pre-legislative scrutiny would be completed by the end of this parliamentary Session; essentially, that means October or November this year. There is no way that that can now be met, so I am deeply disappointed that after the Government have missed their own deadline, we have not received any form of update. Does my hon. Friend agree that pre-legislative scrutiny would enable this House to come together, and that it is wrong that that scrutiny has not yet taken place?

Peter Gibson: Very sadly, what my hon. Friend says is correct. I pay tribute to her for her significant leadership on the issue. I have worked with her, alongside colleagues such as my hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich East (Nicola Richards), for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) and for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan). Many of us have campaigned and pressed for a trans-inclusive ban on conversion therapy, and it is deeply saddening that we have not yet seen it.

Moving on, my constituents are still facing impossibly long waits for mental health treatment, particularly for children. I have spoken in this place many times on the need to bring down waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services. I know that Ministers are aware of the issue and working hard on it, but I again press them to do all they can to ensure that we leave no child behind. Ministers are also aware of the ongoing situation with the provision of mental health services in Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, and the recent rapid review. In recent weeks and months, we have seen continuing coverage of yet more alarming news about TEWV, particularly the work of the crisis team. I press Ministers to continue to work with me and others, and to do all they can to improve TEWV services so that my constituents can get the care they need and deserve.

Every week my team, led by the amazing Rachael Hughes Booth, handle hundreds of pieces of casework—in fact, some 31,537 since I was elected—and every day there are successes, from securing a passport so that a family can take a long-planned holiday, to getting people treatment for rare conditions or reimbursement of unpaid benefits. That, for me, is the most important part of this job.

Darlington has had a lot to celebrate over the last few years, although our community has, like everyone's, faced significant challenges. Our town is truly on the cusp of something great. It is the honour of a lifetime to represent the people of Darlington in this place, and I will continue to work hard every day to repay the trust they have put in me.

Finally, I thank staff across the House and all my team for all that they do. I wish everyone a happy recess.

3.19 pm

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): May I start by saying what a pleasure it is to see the Vice-Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household on the Front Bench? She is

my Whip, and a very good Whip she is too. I would say that in this House even if she was not a good Whip, because we must keep the Whips inside, but it happens to be true.

I will start with a number of thank yous. First, I thank my staff team: Maoliosa Smith, Jamie Carter, James Williams and Louise Brown. All of our staff make us look better than we are; mine are no different and I am very grateful to them. I also want to thank a number of organisations and individuals in the constituency and this place for helping with various things I have done in the past year. I have run quite a number of events and campaigns locally and could not have done so without the help of lots of different people.

I began a work experience campaign last year because I found—and I think most Members would find this if they checked—that work experience has dramatically declined in the post-covid period. With so many people working from home, it has been one of the things dropped, yet it is crucial for people in their school years and later teens to get experience of the workplace, understand how it works, make connections and observe how they should behave. I started the campaign because young people at local schools—I visit one almost every week—were telling me that it was very difficult to get work experience. I was really pleased with the response from companies such as Rebellion, Hachette and Newton Europe, which essentially said, “You know what, you’re right, we have dropped this and we are going to start doing it again.” They have provided really good opportunities for young people locally.

Most of those companies, along with other organisations such as the NHS, the Army, Elite Youth Sports, and so on, then supported an apprenticeship fair that I ran this year to try to widen knowledge of, and access to, the apprenticeships that we have locally. We have lots of great apprenticeship opportunities locally and lots of great organisations offering them, so I am very grateful to them.

I am also very grateful to Thames Valley Police which has run a couple of crime summits with me locally. They were organised after people had reported an increasing number of crime incidents, particularly antisocial behaviour and also business burglaries. The summits were very much for constituents to be able to raise their concerns directly with the police and find out what was going on, but I think it is fair to say that the police found from hearing from people locally that they could be doing better, particularly in the handling of antisocial behaviour, from the focus they give it locally when out and about to how people report it. People were saying, “When I want to report an incident it takes me 40 minutes online to do your form,” and the police were unaware it took that long and have gone away to address that.

I also want to thank a few colleagues on the Government Benches: the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation for taking part in my science and tech forum which he did with companies in Harwell and Milton Park so that they could talk about the challenges they were facing; the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero for taking part in my third annual climate summit a couple of weeks ago; and the Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries for meeting farmers just last week. We have lots of great farmers across my constituency, farming dairy, beef and arable and so on, and my right hon. Friend came to the constituency and sat there and spoke to them. As we know, farmers are a challenging

bunch, but our farming Minister gives as good as he gets and I was very grateful to him for taking part in that forum.

I want to touch on three things and then give a special mention to someone. “Too many houses, not enough infrastructure”: I hear that every single day—since I was first elected, every week when I knock on doors and in every email I receive. I know my constituency is not the only one facing this challenge, but there is particularly an issue when it comes to health services. We all want Grove station reopened, better roads and so on, but we have not seen an increase in the number of GPs that we need for the people we have in the constituency.

A health survey I ran earlier in the year found that 97% of people felt we did not have enough GPs for the number of people we have locally. The Great Western Park estate has been waiting eight years for its promised surgery, and we have another estate being built right by it, Western Valley. These two estates alone will add 18,000 people to the area and there is not a single new doctor. Much as the Lib Dem-run council and local health leaders all say they are committed to trying to solve this problem, we are just not seeing any progress. I am going to keep banging on about this, because when people feel that an increased population affects their quality of life, it is no wonder that they do not want to see more people being added to their area. They become resistant to houses when they might not have been before, and we just have to bang people’s heads together and try to make some progress in this area.

My second issue is a more local one, which is the AEA Technology pension campaign. Part of AEA was privatised—transferred to a new company—in the 1990s, and the advice that employees received about their pensions at that time proved to be inaccurate and misleading. Lots of people transferred their pensions without knowing the increased risk that they would face, and that company went bust. Those people ended up in the Pension Protection Fund, and have pushed for 10 years to try to get someone to look at their case. Finally, this year, we got the National Audit Office to look at it, and the Public Accounts Committee has also looked at it. We now await the Government’s response, but I am very pleased that people are supporting our campaign. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) is one of the people who has been supporting it, because those people have been trying for so long to get their case heard, and now it is finally being heard.

My third issue is the Local Electricity (No. 2) Bill. I am the lead sponsor of that Bill, and just under half of Members in this place now support it. It would remove the barriers for people who want to be able to generate energy locally through renewable sources. At the moment, the start-up costs are too high: it costs in the region of £1 million to get going, which is far too much for a village or a local organisation that wants to generate energy. We have been working on that Bill collectively—working closely with the Minister in charge, the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie)—and are just on the cusp of making progress. I cannot talk about that progress at the moment, but although the amendments were not accepted in the Lords, we have had a very constructive relationship with the Minister in the Commons. We are going to have some good news to announce on that front, which I think will make the Bill’s supporters very pleased.

[David Johnston]

My last thing, as I said, is just a special mention. I am a patron of a number of local charities that I have talked about in this place before, such as Play2Give and Secret Santa 365, but I am also patron of a charity called Team Mikayla—it is incredible how many of the charities in my local area were set up by children. This young lady, Mikayla Beames, had a brain tumour at the age of four, and as soon as she was able to, she decided that she wanted to help all the children who were suffering from cancer. She set up her own charity at a very young age; she is still a teenager, but for years now she has been supporting children in the local community who are facing cancer diagnoses. She is an incredibly inspirational young lady, and this year was chosen as one of the King's coronation champions for the whole country. It was an incredibly proud moment for her—a deserved recognition. I just wanted to take this opportunity to congratulate her.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish you and everybody who works in Parliament a very restful recess.

3.27 pm

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): As always, it is a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston). As many Members have already said, we all aspire to represent and promote our communities in the way Sir David Amess was famous for. Unlike him, I do not have a town that is big enough for me to campaign to make it into a city; however, I do have Newton Aycliffe, which has its 75th birthday this year. It is also the 75th birthday of its community newspaper, Newton News, and for Newton Press, it is 60 years—I got that wrong two weeks ago, so I needed to correct that detail.

At the start, I would like to commend the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for her work on the menopause and give a call-out to a constituent of mine, Kathrine Winter, who works very hard in that space as well. I also offer my support to Rob Potts in his campaign to be the police and crime commissioner for Durham and Darlington in the upcoming elections, and I encourage the current PCC to make sure that the community retains its complement of police officers, which is currently under threat because the facility is being challenged by having to share with the fire station. That needs to be sorted, in the short term and also, critically, in the long term. I do not want to have to wait for Rob to get elected before we get this sorted out—it needs to be done much earlier than that.

The main theme I want to talk about is opportunity through education. Education is a lifelong opportunity. I was elected on a manifesto that recognised and promised to address the need to equalise educational opportunities across our nations. Breaking for summer recess gives us an opportunity to look back on what we have done so far, and I will talk about the progress we are making in Sedgefield. It has always been accepted that the best way to improve your situation or to get out of poverty is through work, and the better your education, the better the chance to take work opportunities when they arise. It is important that the Government help to deliver the platforms and that students are able to make informed choices.

In 2019, 77% of the schools in my constituency were rated good or outstanding; now, 91% are. As the APPG for “left behind” neighbourhoods that I chair found,

education is critical, even more so in left-behind neighbourhoods, so I thank local trusts for their support. I look to the dormant assets scheme to deliver a community wealth fund to help these communities.

Since 2019, the Government have committed to investing in a number of our local schools, including Woodham Academy, Ferryhill Station Primary School, Forest Park School and Greenfield Community College. I am thrilled at the work going on at Woodham Academy in Newton Aycliffe. The complete rebuild of this secondary school is expected to be finished in September next year, so we are one academic year away from its reopening. The development is funded through the Department for Education's school rebuilding programme, and facilities include a swimming pool, a sports hall and a fitness studio. As well as benefiting students, it will be open to the community outside school hours.

Woodham Academy is doing everything it can to ensure that the building is green from the ground up, with heat pumps and photovoltaic panels to reduce the carbon impact. It will have electric vehicle charging facilities, but also cycle parking, and I think the Government need to continue their efforts to encourage our children to walk or cycle to school wherever possible.

Ferryhill Station is another local school benefiting from the rebuilding programme. Built in the 19th century, the school has been enjoyed by generations of students, but it is definitely showing its age. Although Ferryhill Station's plans are at an earlier stage than Woodham's, as a former chair of the governors at the primary school, I am confident that they will be just as ambitious and I look forward to seeing the outcome.

From next year, we will also have Forest Park School, a small special educational needs school for students aged 11 to 16 that is focused on enabling them to grow academically and socially. It plans to offer adapted extracurricular activities, so that students who find standard offerings difficult to access can still enjoy them. I have been to the school; the way it is developing is outstanding, and I really look forward to its delivery. Developments at Greenfield Community College in Aycliffe will also help to deliver improved provision, and I look forward to those concluding.

As we all know, though, schools are nothing without excellent teachers. I have visited many of the schools in Sedgefield and I applaud all the teachers, teaching assistants, kitchen staff and estate staff who deliver for our young people. All of them made fantastic efforts throughout the pandemic years, and many have made a huge difference, but our young people have still had the most disrupted education of any generation for many a year. I congratulate all those who persevered and have continued their education.

I call out in particular the Ferryhill ambassadors for their community engagement, Hardwick Primary in Sedgefield for being nominated as one of the top 10 schools worldwide for innovation, and Deaf Hill Primary for its success in the Kellogg's Breakfast Club awards. When I call out some schools but miss out others, I know it is a risk, but from Welbeck in the north to Hurworth in the south, Bishopton in the east and Heighington in the west, and everywhere in the 250 square miles in between, there are examples of excellence.

As students progress, their opportunities come from having choices and applying themselves. It is crucial that their choices are informed and that they see options

like University Technical College South Durham, rated third out of 4,518 schools in England for students entering an apprenticeship. Questions have been asked about some UTCs and T-levels, but the partnership UTC South Durham has with Hitachi and Gestamp means we have an outstanding facility in Newton Aycliffe.

As the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education have said, university choices need to be clear; students need to be very aware of the life options that will arise from their choices, and the universities have to provide courses that deliver full value. Sedgefield is not blessed with a university, but we are surrounded by them. We have Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Teesside and Sunderland, all of which give complementary opportunities for students to choose from. I am an alumnus of Durham, I studied night classes at Teesside, and I have been to the Newcastle and Northumbria campuses. While space must be left for those who want non-vocational study, it is imperative that universities engage with businesses to deliver the workforce of the future.

I have talked with many businesses about their needs and I have seen some fantastic engagement recently, particularly in Durham and Northumbria, in support of our growing space and semiconductor industries. Northumbria University recently received a £5 million award from the UK Space Agency to develop a new laser-based communication system.

A good public transport service is essential for our students to get to school or college, but such a service is not available for people in the Trimdons, Ferryhill, Cornforth, Fishburn and Sedgefield in particular. Just like my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson), I believe it is imperative that Arriva and our local councils get together to solve the bus problems that exist in our area.

Ian Mearns: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said. I am a member of the Education Committee. In order for our students to get to colleges or apprenticeships, they need not only good public transport, but good quality, independent and impartial careers information, educational advice and guidance to direct them there in the first place and to show them what opportunities exist. I am afraid to say, however, that independent and impartial advice is not always available in many institutions that provide education to those below the age of 18.

Paul Howell: I can only agree about the need for that information. I drive around an industrial estate in Aycliffe that has 10,000 jobs and lots of boxes in it. Behind each one of those boxes, there are so many different careers and opportunities. Getting visibility of that is absolutely crucial.

I am pleased to say that a north-east mayoralty has been created, covering the area from Newton Aycliffe, in my Sedgefield constituency, all the way through Northumberland to the Scottish border. The area has been allocated one of the investment zones, and I hope it will position itself as an arc from Sedgefield to Blyth, recognising innovation and science throughout the north-east. Attracting the right prime to support that should be a critical part of the role of the new metro Mayor, when they are appointed. That prime could then be a key platform for building career paths and educational pathways for the north-east's students.

Students need to know about how such pathways can lead to great careers. When it comes to communicating opportunity, role models are a great tool. One of the best role models I have come across is our new chancellor of Durham University, Dr Fiona Hill. With her story, from the back streets of Bishop Auckland to Washington DC, or, as she calls it,

“from the coal house to the White House,”

Fiona is committed to supporting social mobility and I could not be more supportive of what she is trying to achieve.

While highlighting extraordinary stories like Fiona's, we need the breadth of opportunities to be visible too. We need to shine a light on and support the extraordinary businesses and research in our area, because that will inspire people to apply. It is through personal application that opportunities arise. In my youth, there was a golfer called Gary Player, who said:

“The harder I work, the luckier I get.”

We need to inspire our young people to work hard and get lucky.

I conclude, as most Members have done, by thanking you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the members of Mr Speaker's team for their service, and I thank the people around this great place for everything they have done to make our lives easier. I thank my team—David, Maggie, Doug, Hannah and Jonathan—and, as always, my family and friends. My wife is in the Gallery; the biggest thanks go up there. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I wish everybody a happy recess.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you, Mrs Howell. I intend to do the wind-ups no later than 4.30 pm, and they will be eight minutes, 10 minutes and 10 minutes, followed by two minutes for Mr Mearns to wash up completely. Members can do the maths themselves as to how much time they will leave for the person who is last.

3.39 pm

Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con): Tempting as it is to add to the thanks from colleagues who have spoken already or to respond to the many interesting points that have been raised, I will not do that, nor will I make lengthy reference to my constituency. Instead, I would like to offer some hope. I would like to counter the declinist narrative that says the UK is in a bad way, that our prospects are poor, that this Government are doing the wrong things to the wrong people, making ill-advised decisions about the company we keep, all for the wrong motives, and that things will continue to go downhill. I disagree. I think that that is selective at best, and misrepresentation and falsehood at worst.

The fact is that the UK has a great past and prospects of a greater future—incidentally, points with which I know Sir David would have agreed wholeheartedly. The evidence is that we are doing many of the right things. We are building important links for the best of reasons from strong foundations. The world is increasingly unstable—a point the Defence Secretary himself made recently—and yet our system has outlasted others and adapted to worse. This speech is about the importance of our Union—the most successful political union in history—and why it has worked, why it matters now and why it is the foundation for our future.

[Robin Millar]

Let us consider these foundations. We benefit from a helpful geography, temperate climate and strategic location. The seas have acted as both barrier and connector to the rest of the globe. Internally, connections and infrastructure of canals, road and rail have made us stronger as we have traded among one another. Our system of common law offers an unparalleled environment for the flourishing, testing and implementation of ideas. Contrast that with restrictive regulatory approaches that seek to predict and control.

We still have in our society a culture of policing by consent, albeit a much tested one. We enjoy safety in our streets and, of course, the security and fiscal firepower that comes with being the fifth or sixth—depending on who we believe—largest economy in the world. We stand here today as inheritors of these great assets of a system that is stable and provides for smooth transition of power, despite considerable test from without and within. What part of us could have endured what we have been through as a whole on its own or achieved what we have together on its own?

Of course, these foundations include our identity—who we are and what we think. Values are not a recipe or menu, and truth is not some kind of sushi bar conveyor of ever changing delicacies that pass before us. Truth, too, does not change. What, then, have we struggled for and fought over? Are these not the things we value? Where have been the acts of courage, beauty, genius and tragedy to secure our freedoms, establish democracy, promote fairness, inspire hope and vision and protect our borders, for without them, what are we? We have built institutions on these things. A cenotaph in every village speaks of the ultimate sacrifice paid for shared endeavours.

I am conscious that by-elections are happening today. They speak to the great system of checks and balances we have put in place to secure the things that we value. Here I note the big-heartedness of Union thinking. It has to make room for those who do not want to be part of it. Contrast that with the self-diminishing purity spiral of other ways of thinking. The Union must embrace the difficulties that come with that sense of inclusion. To exclude is to deny itself.

Is our story not one of different parts coming together at different times, for different reasons and in different ways? Do our own personal stories not also reflect this? Is this Britishness we have by merit of being thrown together on a small set of rocks on the periphery of Europe? The stories we each carry speak of this. My mother was a naturalised British citizen; I was born in Wales, and I am a proud Welshman and proud to be British. When we look at the demographics, we find that one in eight Scottish, one in five Welsh and one in nine Northern Irish people live in another part of the UK. Is not the story of the Union simply a collection and weaving together of our own stories—a cord of many, many strands that is not easily broken and with a strength that cares?

When covid fell, 14.6 million jobs were saved through vital furlough and self-employment support. This Government acted. Two million people—I repeat, 2 million—were added to universal credit in seven days. Nothing else like that has been seen on earth. We now have energy support, tailored and with a price cap, estimated at £78 billion.

What then for those links? Where do they take us? Here I confess a concern, because I support our democratically established devolution and institutions, but our Union is no federal construct. The unintended consequence of devolution has been to replace covenants with contracts, trust with transactions and nurturing relationships with burgeoning regulation. Who of us would manage our own relationships in the way we approach devolution? Sadly, it has facilitated institutional capture. Devolution has become for some a tower that must be built ever stronger and ever higher. That does allow us to see further, but it takes the occupants no closer to the promised land they seek.

Looking outwards beyond our shores, we have proved, for example in the Commonwealth, our ability to form, deepen and maintain working relationships. Countries seek our help and heed our advice, and today we are respected around the world. We have the world's fourth-largest diplomatic network, with 281 posts in 178 countries; we are a member of the United Nations Security Council and the G7. Our system of common law, which I have already mentioned, is emulated and is being implemented around the world. Now, as a result of this Government, we are the only country on Earth to have free trade deals with the two biggest trading blocs: the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership and the European economic area.

Of course, we are also standing up to Russia. I did not want to lead on this, but we have the fourth best-funded military and we lead a coalition of 38 countries in the Gulf, ensuring the safe passage of goods and fuel through that stretch of water. In time of domestic crisis, we mobilised 23,000 members of our armed forces for the covid support force in every part of the UK.

Such foundations have built strong relationships for us, and what have we done with them? A favourable environment has helped us to establish a history and tradition of manufacturing and innovation. The connections that are around us have made us a force in international trade, delivered one of the world's largest economies and established London as a leading global city.

In my recent speech on artificial intelligence in this Chamber, I highlighted the risk of a regulatory reproach to that industry. UK common law, by contrast, fosters immense opportunity. The right environment for the most exciting technologies is here. In the life sciences, we have again seen that a regulatory approach has a chilling effect: the EU clinical trials directive stopped 25% of trials and doubled approval times, and the European Medicines Agency takes twice as long to approve cancer drugs as the United States Food and Drug Administration.

Instead, in this country, because of the actions of this Government, we are seeing pharmacology investments through the likes of BioNTech and Grail, and the potential to unleash UK Biobank and the 100,000 Genomes Project. Through genetic engineering, the potential productivity gains for farmers within a generation are staggering. In fact, when it comes to research and development, four of the top 10 world universities are here in the UK. Unencumbered by a €2 trillion EU bail-out, we have been able to invest a further third in our own R&D, raising it to a record £39.8 billion.

I have been deliberately provocative in some of those illustrations, Mr Deputy Speaker, and some of them are contested, but that makes my next point: the opportunity—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Before you do that, could you finish by 3.50 pm, please? I am introducing an eight-minute limit.

Robin Millar: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was going to say that the opportunity to contest those ideas and the crucible for doing so is here in the UK.

What then of the future? Leadership is looking within, looking up and looking ahead. We have done that through the darkness of world wars, conflict and suffering. We have responded to the threats of a pandemic and war in Ukraine. We have led. We have seen beyond the boundaries of the EU that we were constrained by.

The first part of any plan for this country must therefore be a collective response, together as a United Kingdom. We are not preparing for the last war or for old customers; AUKUS and the CPTPP are all about responding to the future and the opportunities and threats there. What better testimony is there than the fact that we are the most attractive country in the G20 amongst 18 to 24-year-olds?

A nation does not define itself through introspection, but through action. As we emerge from the storms of recent years, we British find ourselves once again the authors of our own distinctive story. As with the Britain of previous ages, the story is likely to offer fresh sources of collective pride, beauty and dismay. We will write this together with the values we defend and the words that we speak. I will finish by calling on the Minister to bring the Minister for the Union—the Prime Minister—to this House to lead a debate on the state of the Union, a story that is important for us all to hear.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): There is now an eight-minute limit. Any interventions will eat into the time of the person who is last.

3.50 pm

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): I begin by thanking you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and Mr Speaker's whole team for all your support this year. It has been much appreciated. Speaking in the second Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate is a huge privilege for me. It is wonderful to hear so many warm wishes and memories, which I know are of great comfort to Lady Amess and the whole family.

Many people have said to me, "When is a plaque going to go up in this Chamber to commemorate Sir David?". I am delighted to tell the House that that plaque has now been designed. It is nearly ready. I know we are not allowed to use props, and I will not, but I want to tell the House that if anyone wants to come and see the plaque, it is extremely beautiful. I have a copy on the Bench here. The motto says, "His light remains", which I think is incredibly apt. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

I must start by saying how delighted Sir David would have been that the Boundary Commission has decided not to break up his beloved Southend West constituency, and I am delighted that I will continue to represent the people of the Eastwood and St Laurence wards. I look forward to adding the people from St Lukes ward.

Our new outstanding sports reporter at the *Echo*, Chris Phillips, recently played tennis for 11 hours non-stop to raise money for South East and Central Essex Mind, raising £12,000. That takes his total fundraising to more than £100,000. He is a community hero.

It is also wonderful to know that Leigh-on-Sea will be recognised in our constituency name. It was, after all, named in the Domesday Book. I must declare an interest, because it is where I was born.

Next, I must highlight our great success in the May elections. Sir David would have loved the fact that we now have 14 Conservative town councillors—a comfortable majority on Leigh-on-Sea Town Council—and that we took back control of Southend-on-Sea City Council with two new Conservative councillors, including the excellent Owen Cartey in West Leigh, who happens to be my councillor.

I am also delighted this year to welcome as mayor Councillor Stephen Habermel of Chalkwell, with his chosen charities Havens Hospices and the incredible, awe-inspiring Music Man Project, which some Members heard playing brilliantly again last night in College Green. They recently played at No. 10, and there was not a dry eye in the house. They are soon to come to Parliament.

People often ask me, "What have you been doing for our constituency? What are your priorities?". My first priority this last year has been to make Southend West safer. I am delighted that we now have 83 more police officers, three new sets of knife detection poles and new CCTV cameras in Old Leigh. Our pioneering Operation Union is not only being repeated this summer, but being rolled out nationwide. Thanks to the inspirational Julie Taylor, we have bleed kits available in ever more pubs and clubs.

I am particularly delighted that by working with the brilliant local policeman, Inspector Paul Hogben, our Conservative police and crime commissioner, Roger Hirst, and the Home Office, we are soon to ban nitrous oxide, and zombie knives in all their forms will soon be completely outlawed in private places. That will make Southend safer, and that is much to be commended. I must also commend Eastwood Academy which, through me, fed into the recent Home Office consultation.

That is not all. Making Southend West healthier has also been a top priority, and with the support of this Conservative Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (Sir James Duddridge) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), we have secured the delivery of more than £8 million for a reconfigured A&E department at Southend University Hospital, more than £1 million for a new active discharge lounge, 11 new ambulances and 111 new ambulance staff. With other south Essex colleagues, we have finally secured from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care an absolute promise that the remaining £110 million pledged to improve our local hospitals is secure, and we await an updated in-scope business plan.

I pay tribute to the work of those from the Lady McAdden Breast Cancer Trust who, with their knitted knockers, will be returning to Parliament during Breast Cancer Awareness Week this autumn. Thanks to the work of Sam Batstone, we now have free sunscreen dispensers along some of our beaches. Working with Chalkwell Lifeguards, I have sponsored one of them myself, and I thank Philip Miller, the CEO of Adventure Island, for sponsoring another.

I thank everybody who works so hard in our NHS in Southend West for the incredible work that they do. That is one of the reasons I am campaigning for a

[Anna Firth]

dedicated NHS medal to recognise their outstanding service, just as we already have for the police, the Army, the Post Office and the fire service.

Of course, that is not all. My third priority has been to make Southend West wealthier, so I am delighted we kicked off the year by being given the pier of the year award. I know the pier is not in Southend West, but as many Members know, Sir David strayed right across Southend in this place and in his patch. Southend is already home to incredible music, theatre and arts, which is why I want to see us finally become a city of culture in 2029. I have been to at least 50 productions in the past year alone, including by the brilliant Love2Sign choir, the Southend Operatic and Dramatic Society, Leigh Orpheus, Cantare, the Show Choir and the Eastwood Chorale, to name but a few. We have an incredible seaside and underwater heritage, including the London shipwreck. We have five blue flag beaches—the most anywhere in the east of England—and the biggest ferris wheel in the south-east. We have had eight seaside awards, and we have a growing number of octopuses, dolphins, porpoises and seals.

Of course, no city can prosper without a thriving local economy, which is why I was delighted to spearhead a new banking hub at Leigh Broadway, and to help our fishermen—Osborne's, Deal's and Fruits of the Sea—to negotiate their new fishing licences. We must have a transport system fit for a city, and with this Conservative Government, that is exactly what we are going to get. We now have a new bus route, 12 new state-of-the-art trains, with contactless ticketing coming, and upgrades to the A13. I have been very clear that we must not lose any of our ticketing staff at any of the stations in my patch.

There are heroes everywhere in Southend West, which is why I have had to launch a community heroes scheme, alongside my local papers, the *Echo* and the *Leigh-on-Sea News*. I thank and pay tribute to their editors, Chris Hatton and Mike Guy, for their support in making this happen. Already nominated by the community, we have had community heroes Jill Allen-King, Chalkwell Lifeguards, the Love2Sign choir, Anne Thurgood, Sharon Gatland, Brenda Barnes, Claire Harper, Steve Ellis, Jack Venturini, David Dutton, Bob Hazell and 14-year-old Maryse Fisher, with many others to come.

Of course, that is not all. In time-honoured fashion, I must also recognise the work of the Bluetits, Southend Against Sewage and all 29 of our local headteachers. With 28 of our 29 schools being good or outstanding, I welcome wholeheartedly the £78.6 billion of record funding for our schools.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry, but we have to leave it there. Thank you very much, but in Sir David's inimitable style, you got a lot in there.

3.58 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): On 1 March this year, the Home Office stated that within four months—that is now—RAF Scampton would be up and running to its full capacity of 2,000 illegal migrants. It is now the end of July, and as of today there are zero migrants housed at Scampton.

In May, I tabled a written question asking when works would begin. All the Home Office basically said in the ministerial reply was “shortly” and “as soon as possible”. The Home Office has not even taken control of the site from the Ministry of Defence. It has not commenced the survey work needed even to establish an implementation plan. It has not done an airwaves control plan, and it has not developed a mitigation strategy for safe entry to and exit from the site. It has not made any proposals regarding how to manage the wide-ranging contamination on the site. We know there is certainly asbestos on the site. Unfortunately, despite my requests, the Home Office refuses to release the material safety data sheets for Scampton.

Earlier this month, I tabled a written question asking what assessment the Home Office had made of the potential radioactivity levels at Scampton. I received an email from a cold war RAF veteran, who spent nine years at Scampton servicing Vulcan B.2 bombers. He reported:

“During that time the RAF ensured that our working clothing was regularly laundered to ensure complete removal of all ‘Radiation’ particles in the interest of our health and safety...The Vulcan aircraft were covered in Radiation particles particularly during high level sorties and we were tasked to wash them down on a regular basis at a specially prepared area on the airfield...The Wash Teams were supplied with special protective clothing to undertake this task.”

I am afraid that the Home Office's reply was less than reassuring. It merely asserted that it will

“ensure that all accommodation is safe, habitable, fit for purpose, and meets all regulatory requirements”.

The Government have utilised class Q emergency powers for their plans. They notified West Lindsey District Council of that on 17 April 2023, so their emergency powers will expire on 16 April 2024. Under class Q, any and all development related to those powers must be removed from the site by 16 April 2024. That is under eight months from the actual date illegal migrants are expected to arrive at the site. West Lindsey applied to get the former officers' mess listed on 24 March. It has chased that up and understands that it will be presented to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport imminently, but we are still waiting.

Perhaps the Home Office should accept our advice that Scampton is far more complicated a site than it anticipated at the beginning of this saga. Any temporary housing of migrants there risks being so temporary as to be useless and ineffective. Meanwhile, we have a £300 million regeneration package signed, sealed and champing at the bit for delivery. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. We can transform Scampton into a mixed-use site, protecting the history of the base while opening up commercial, aerospace, defence, hospitality and educational opportunities. There will be a Red Arrows visitors centre. The runway will be kept open for use, and the skies will still be used for Red Arrows training and practice flights. Business jets will be able to use Scampton, opening up opportunities for enterprise across West Lindsey. A space innovation business park would bring research and development to Lincolnshire. Drones and other unmanned aerial vehicles can be developed at Scampton.

The A46 midlands aerospace corridor can be an engine for growth. There are plans for a business incubator to help small businesses to grow into larger ones. Scampton

Holdings wants to promote small businesses even beyond the business incubator zone by creating a number of low-cost live work units to help microbusinesses. The protection of RAF Scampton's history is at the heart of the regeneration package. It would see historic buildings used by the Dambusters restored and utilised for educational, informational and touristic purposes. Scampton will become a centre for aviation heritage and the maintenance of historic aircraft. A conference centre will link it with hotel and hospitality facilities, but Scampton's aviation history would not be dead. The runway would be kept operational and licensed under the Civil Aviation Authority. EGR313, the restricted flying zone above and around Scampton, would be maintained. It could still be used by the Red Arrows. The last time the Red Arrows left Scampton, they came back because the airspace was ideal. Even though they will not be based on the ground, they will still be able to use the skies. The longer-term hope, as I said, is for Scampton to be developed as a spaceport. There is potential for horizontal launches of small satellites.

Since RAF Scampton's closure was announced in 2018, West Lindsey District Council has moved heaven and earth to try to come up with a good regeneration bid. My fellow Lincolnshire MPs and I know how badly things can go when surplus Ministry of Defence properties are just dumped on the open market: no consultation with locals, no discussions about local needs or priorities, and no crafting of investment or creation of economic opportunities—just flog it off and it is no longer the MOD's responsibility. That is what we saw with previous disposals. I was determined, and West Lindsey was determined, that we must not let that happen this time. Here is an ideal site, just miles from Lincoln, and precisely where our economy could use a shot in the arm.

West Lindsey District Council engaged with local people and communities, and consulted and listened to stakeholders, businesses and partners. The simple goal was to create a sustainable future for RAF Scampton that unlocked the fullest potential of the site. The plan that West Lindsey and Scampton Holdings came up with was funded, commercially viable and deliverable. It would keep the airfield open, creating a cascade of further opportunities. It would protect the important heritage of the base, and add amenities for people around West Lindsey, Lincolnshire and the whole country to make use of. Meanwhile, the Home Office plans throw a spanner in the works. As we have seen, its proposed timeline has been wildly off course. The investment opportunities that we want to unlock require immediate access to the site in order to kick-start delivery.

Key features of the site, such as the runway and its associated operational functions, are being neglected. Even the grass is growing, and 100 buildings, many of them listed, are at risk. If the restricted airspace is permanently stood down, it would negate many of the air, space and satellite investments that we want to deliver. West Lindsey has brought a legal challenge to the Home Office's plans that is proceeding at pace. My understanding is that, if the environmental impact assessment is found to be flawed, the class Q emergency powers may be rendered invalid.

We seek assurance from the Secretary of State that Scampton will not be used to accommodate illegal immigrants until a final resolution is reached, after the judicial review. We in West Lindsey in Lincolnshire are part of the great United Kingdom. Time and again, this

proposal has been announced. We have stated that we are willing to do our bit, but all the Home Office seems to need is a bit of hard standing somewhere—anywhere—in which to temporarily house these economic migrants in portacabin accommodation. Choosing Scampton of all places, which is on the cusp of remarkable, game-changing regeneration, is the height of folly. It is mind-numbingly unwise. It shows that any claim of the Government's to joined-up thinking is totally divorced from reality.

All is not lost; there is still time for Ministers to drop these plans. I have shown how much trouble they cause, and how little reward is to be gained from carrying them through. If our court case fails, and somehow the Home Office is allowed to advance with its proposals, we will need to see how much of the site can be freed up as soon as possible. The Home Office wants to use only 8% of the footprint. Surely the majority of the site can be handed over to West Lindsey and Scampton Holdings, so that they can crack on with the regeneration that is so dearly needed. Let them get on and finish the job.

I apologise for having to speak so quickly, but this is an incredibly important issue. There is an impending court case, and a lot to say, and everything must be put on the record in this House.

4.6 pm

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): First, may I align myself with all the tributes to Sir David Amess? His was a life unfairly cut short, but his memory will live on forever. Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all the staff: the Clerks, the Doorkeepers, the Speaker's team—everyone who keeps democracy alive behind the scenes; it is hugely appreciated.

Thanks is the theme of my speech, which I will do my best to give as quickly as possible. When I stood for election in 2019, I had a series of key pledges, and I am pleased to say that, this year, I will deliver on every single one of them. While many politicians like to take all the credit for themselves, I know that this has been done through teamwork, and with the support of others. That is why I want to spend my time thanking the people who made fulfilling the pledges possible.

The first pledge was perhaps the most prominent: securing the funding for Watford General Hospital. My thanks go to the leadership team at West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, including—but not exclusively—Matthew Coats and Phil Townsend, who have been phenomenal in making sure that the plans were achievable and ambitious, and that we secured the funding. They have helped me be an absolute pain in the neck to Ministers, from the Prime Minister down, every single day, so that they knew what we wanted, and we were able to achieve it.

I came into Parliament with a challenge to tackle the stigma around mental ill health. I launched an initiative to train 1,000 people in mental health first aid awareness; I would love to go into much more detail on that, and the work that I am doing. I give particular thanks to the team at Watford and West Herts chamber of commerce, especially Chris, Saffron and Lee, who have been phenomenal in making sure that we are hitting that target. I have good news coming on that later in the year, but I do not want to jump too far ahead on that.

On the national scale, there is my work on the First-Aid (Mental Health) Bill. I am also trying to encourage the Government to look at how we could change the rules

[Dean Russell]

to ensure better parity between physical and mental health in the Health and Safety Executive guidelines. I have been very grateful to the Ministers who have met me to discuss that; to those across the UK who are tackling suicide prevention; to the team behind Baton of Hope; to the team who worked with me on the “Where’s your head at?” campaign, for which I am proud to be an ambassador; and to Dr Alex George and Chris Murray, who have been phenomenal this year. They have really helped and supported me, and driven me forward to deliver on my promises.

I said that I wanted to tackle rough sleeping. I am pleased to say that, over the past three and a half years, I think around £5 million—possibly a bit less or a bit more—for this issue has gone to Watford. I have really fought for that and worked with Government to achieve it. It meant that, in Watford, we went from having 70 to 80 people on the streets every night over decades, to zero at one point in the past couple of years. I think we are at around five to 10 people now; one person on the streets is too many, so we need to make sure that we support them.

Yes, I could get the Government funding; I could get support for the issue, and push and champion it; but really, this action was sparked by a gentleman called Matthew Heasman at New Hope UK, a fantastic local charity, and Rob Edmonds. Matthew got me involved from day one of the pandemic. He helped me to get the Government to make sure that we could get everyone in and that has continued. The team at One YMCA have been phenomenal in making sure that we deliver on that and have a process that really supports people; Guy Foxell and Mark Turner enabled that.

Outside Watford, there are, sadly, still more rough sleepers. So I am working with Hand on Heart, which is a fantastic charity that works from Watford, to support others in other constituencies. On business, I would love to go more into the list of businesses that I have visited, but the big one for me was making sure that we supported our hospitality sector. Last year, there was a risk to Pryzm nightclub, which I held a debate on in this Chamber and I also presented a petition on it. The nightclub was saved, thanks to the work that I did with the team there, who were phenomenal, especially David Vickery; they were incredible. The reason that work was so important is that it supported our night-time economy. It protected our taxi drivers, making sure that they had people to drive home every night. We have about 1,500 to 3,000 people coming into Watford just to use the night-time economy, and Pryzm nightclub is at the heart of that. Even one of our own Doorkeepers met his wife there, so there is definitely a Westminster link there. Also challenging from a business perspective was making sure that we continued to fight the nonsense from the Mayor of London around ULEZ, because that will cost my constituents a lot of money, especially those who are struggling.

On tackling crime, I am pleased to say that, thanks to the work with the local police and our police and crime commissioner, we have a new police station coming later in the year, which is fantastic news. Our current police station is in a place called Shady Lane, so I am a bit upset that we are losing the Shady Lane police station, but the new one will be much more modern and suitable for our fantastic new police officers and our fantastic team.

I would also like to formally welcome our new police chief inspector, Andy Wiseman, and all of the new police officers who were secured across Hertfordshire—more than 300 extra police officers, I think, which is fantastic. I also thank them for the support that they have given me when I have been out on dawn raids. There is always a bit of a panic when they say the address that the police are going to raid, because there is the worry that your house will be mentioned. Thankfully, that has not happened so far. It has been phenomenal going out with the police, often in the middle of the night, to see what they do to keep us safe and to make sure that, behind the scenes, the bad people do not get away with what they want to do. It is incredible work.

I wish to thank everyone, including students from various schools, who have been part of Dean’s green team, working on the environment. One of the big pledges that was made during the election was to end the use of single-use plastic. I know that that is coming through later this year, which is phenomenal. The Environment Act 2021 and all the work that was done at COP26 have been so important for all of us around the world, but especially for my constituents in Watford, who are very caring about our local environment.

I have previously talked a lot about our local community and the charities that do so much. They include One Vision, Watford Workshop, Community Connect, Step2Skills, Alternatives, the Random Café, Watford Women’s Centre and Watford Interfaith Association. There are so many I could list. They are all phenomenal, but what they are really good at is working together. That is what is so important. As we look at community, it is about the threads that combine us into a tapestry of the story of our town and our community. We also have every religion in Watford—it is one of the wonderful things about our interfaith community. I will not mention any of the faiths now, because I know that I will miss out about five as I try to rush through my points.

If I may, I will encourage all to watch “Mission Impossible”. It is a bit of a turn-off, but I said at the start that this was an impossible mission for me. During the pandemic, I was very proud that “Mission Impossible”, which is in cinemas now, was partly filmed in Leavesden. I helped to change the rules with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office to make sure that film doubles could change, so that Tom Cruise could go around the world and get the rest of the world to follow our rules, which meant that the film could be filmed and be in our cinemas today. That was a massive change, and I thank the team in Government at the time for enabling that to happen.

As with everyone else, I could not do this job without my team. We have worked on more than 20,000 cases. I thank Tori, Michelle, Jayne, Abbie, Imogen and now Jonathan for all their hard work. The surgeries that we hold and the work that we do behind the scenes are just phenomenal.

My final thanks go to two people, without whom I could not do this speech: my parents. It is their emerald anniversary today—55 years. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Happy anniversary.

4.14 pm

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): I start by remembering our dear friend, Sir David Amess, who was a personal family friend as well. He took a day trip to Hyndburn

just after I was elected to visit the grave of my predecessor, Ken Hargreaves. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, we are not always blessed with beautiful weather in east Lancashire. However, Sir David turned up with a bag of 15 candles for us to light at Ken Hargreaves' grave. After about 15 minutes of attempting to light the candles in the pouring rain, Members can imagine that it was becoming rather frustrating that Sir David was not giving up. Eventually, though, he did, and we ended up at the pub and getting his dog of the day captured from the Ossy Con club in Oswaldtwistle.

Our duty in this place is to our constituents who elect us. For some, the cut and thrust of parliamentary politics seems alien. The atmosphere can sometimes be fraught and the debate is always robust. But as I prepare to return to my constituency of Hyndburn and Haslingden, I am reminded of all the good work that we can do in our privileged position as Members of Parliament for our constituencies and our constituents. In that spirit, I wish briefly to mention the debate I led in Westminster Hall yesterday on hyperemesis gravidarum, a cruel condition that affects pregnant women, including a constituent of mine, Jessica Cronshaw, who sadly passed away after suffering with HG at 28 weeks pregnant with her beautiful baby Elsie. It reminded me of the vital work that we do here and will hopefully be the starting point for change for all HG sufferers.

When I was elected in 2019, I was 24 years of age and suddenly found myself representing my home town here in this place. People often told me that I was fighting an uphill battle and that our area was down and out after a decade of managed decline at a local level. I wanted to change that perception and to provide people who had given me so much during my upbringing with some hope for the future. Now we see the wheels of change in motion in Hyndburn and Haslingden. Although there will always be merchants of doom who trade in complaining but provide no solutions, progress has indeed been made. Earlier this year, we received the news that we had been successful in securing £38 million of levelling-up funding. This historic investment will go a long way to rejuvenating Accrington and incorporates a vision to create more social, cultural, heritage and work space, linked up with our railway station to provide an economic jumpstart for our town. We have also seen investments such as the Clayton community hub and shared prosperity funding to create a vibrant space in Haslingden market.

In Rishton and in Haslingden, two secondary schools are being rebuilt through the schools rebuilding programme, and our further education college is now an institute of technology rolling out T-levels for young people. Such seven-figure investments will ensure that families in Hyndburn and Haslingden can rest assured that their children and grandchildren will be given the best possible start in life. Coupled with the news earlier this week that Hyndburn and Haslingden will receive its highest ever amount of education funding through the national funding formula, it is fair to say that our children and young people will be equipped with the skills they need for the future.

To capitalise on greater investment in our economy and in education, we need jobs. I have been working with great local companies and business groups on increasing the number of apprenticeships in Hyndburn and Haslingden so that we have more high-skilled and well-paid jobs in our area. But life is not just work.

Hyndburn and Haslingden is a beautiful constituency with rolling green fields and many active grassroots sports clubs.

I have been working to improve our parks and green spaces so that everyone can enjoy them, and yet again we have received Government support for that. The news that incidents of fly-tipping are coming down is welcome, and the fact that our council now has increased powers to fine fly-tippers up to £1,000 means we can do more to deter those who would harm our environment. Whether it is cricket, football, rugby, boxing or tennis, I have been working to support my local grassroots clubs so that they can improve their facilities and widen participation, because sports are so important not just for mental and physical health but in providing people, young or old, with a social opportunity.

I return to the point that I made at the start of my speech: in this place we can push for positive change, which is what I try to do here every day for my home because, after all, I have lived there all my life and I want to see the place thrive. There is always more to do and more that I want to do to ensure that we can continue to make strides forward across all towns and villages in Hyndburn and Haslingden.

Finally, I reassure my constituents in Oswaldtwistle and beyond that, as their local MP, I will do everything in my power to make sure that the Civic theatre is reopened after the parent company recently went into liquidation. As many know in Hyndburn and Haslingden, I am an Ossy girl born above the lamp—a Gobbiner—and much of my love for musical theatre started on that very stage, through Moor End Primary School choir and the youth drama group Sparks.

I pay tribute to my fantastic team in Hyndburn and Haslingden and here in Westminster: Alex, Caroline, Stacey, Jo, Steven and James—who is graduating today, so a huge congratulations to James on graduating. Sadly for those on the Front Bench, I will return in September more determined than ever to bring more investment and to deliver more reforms for my Hyndburn and Haslingden constituency. I am sure Ministers are happy they will have a break from my East Lancs accent pushing for change, but I urge them to keep pushing forward with the levelling-up agenda that this Government promised to deliver, so that constituencies like mine that were long forgotten can build on the progress we have made. I thank everybody in the House and hope everybody has a lovely summer recess.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): A lot of celebrations—well done, James.

4.20 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in the David Amess debate yet again.

It is about 10 or 11 years since the Humber was christened the energy estuary, and we have extensive schemes in development. If the country is to achieve its reductions in CO₂ emissions, it has to focus on the Humber, which apparently is the densest cluster in the UK. Zero Carbon Humber is a consortium of major companies that are working towards carbon capture and hydrogen projects. We also have a project for sustainable aviation fuel and a green energy terminal at the port of Immingham, which, as I have said many times, by tonnage is the largest port in the UK.

[*Martin Vickers*]

I was privileged last Friday to go to the official launch of the Humber freeport. It is about seven years since I went to the launch of the freeport project here in Parliament, when a young thrusting Member of Parliament—who happens now to be the Prime Minister—presented a report with the idea of developing freeports. I saw the advantage of that to my constituency and established the freeports all-party parliamentary group to push the Government in that direction. I am delighted that that policy was adopted, and the freeport in the Humber is now established and open for business.

Another thing that would make the area even more attractive to potential investment is the conclusion of the Greater Lincolnshire devolution deal, which has been in and out of various Ministers' files for a number of years. It is crucial if we are to get the best advantage, particularly for the north of Lincolnshire, but the benefits will spread throughout the county.

We were fortunate to have been successful with two levelling-up bids. One was for the Cleethorpes masterplan, which details the further regeneration of what I have said many times is the premier resort of the east coast. The other was for various projects surrounding transport in Barton-upon-Humber, particularly the crucial Barton relief road. Barton has benefited greatly from the reduction in the Humber bridge tolls—an early campaign by myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy)—but Barton is expanding and, like most market towns and villages, has had to take far too many housing developments without the associated public services to support the new residents. I urge the Government, as other Members have this afternoon, to focus on planning system reform so that development runs in tandem with the extension of public services, which are so essential to any community.

As I turn to my final topic, I am delighted that the Rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), has entered the Chamber. As he might expect, I am going to talk, as others have today, about ticket office closures, which is one of those issues that has come to the fore. Every now and again, all Governments and councils make what seems like a routine decision and then it suddenly comes back to bite them. I suggest to the Minister that this might be one of them and that it needs some further consideration.

The rail sector has done much in recent years to assist, in particular, blind and disabled people, and it is those people who are most up in arms about this project. Compromises are surely available. May I suggest one? Perhaps, before implementation—and I hope that implementation is delayed, preferably long delayed—we could at least know where the staff will be redeployed and the hours for which they will be available at the station. There are 10 railway stations in my constituency, and only one, at Cleethorpes, has a ticket office. The objection from North Lincolnshire Council, which has been sent to the Secretary of State, says:

“The Council has previously worked in partnership with TransPennine Express to refurbish and upgrade the ticket offices at Cleethorpes and Grimsby Town train stations. The Council's financial contribution was made through the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme. If the ticket offices are closed... North East Lincolnshire will not experience the anticipated benefits from the Council's ...contribution.”

Yet again, public money has gone into improving a facility that, only a short time later, is closed. This is economic madness. I urge the Minister to reconsider and to take particular note of the objections that are coming from disabled groups, who are passionately opposed to these developments, and I urge the Government to delay their implementation.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We now come to the winding-up speeches. My guidance is for each speaker to take eight minutes.

4.26 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank all Members for their contributions, many of which I agreed with, surprisingly.

I want first to pay my own tribute to Sir David Amess. He was so kind to me. True to his character, he was the first person to come and speak to me when I returned to the House after the death of my husband in 2018. Sir David was a great parliamentarian and one of the most decent human beings I have known.

It may surprise you to know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I made my maiden speech in this place on 16 July 2015. My, how time flies. In that speech, I referred to answers given by constituents to my question, “What's great about Motherwell and Wishaw?” I was able to confirm my own view that folk in Motherwell and Wishaw have a real sense of social justice, and want a fairer and more equal society—which, under continuous Tory Governments since 2015, has not happened. We have the heinous two-child benefit cap, we have been taken out of Europe against our will, and we have been subjected to increasing austerity and a huge increase in the cost of living, especially through the increase in energy costs. Unfortunately, the official Opposition do not propose to immediately reverse the two-child benefit cap, and they have no intention of taking us back to Europe, which will be of no benefit to my constituents.

Shortly after my maiden speech, I established the Poverty Action Network to bring together organisations based in or working in my constituency. It is still going strong, and it is a huge help to me and to my constituents. I want to pay tribute to some of those organisations for all that they do, and I want—in the spirit of Sir David—to mention as many as I can. I will certainly miss some out, but I am going to give it a bash.

Those organisations include Made 4 U in ML2, Motherwell & Wishaw citizens advice bureau, Routes to Work, Christians Against Poverty, the Baptist Church, the National Lottery Community Fund, Lanarkshire Community Food & Health Partnership, North Lanarkshire Disability Forum, the Voice of Experience Forum, Motherwell Football Club Community Trust, North Lanarkshire Carers Together, Befriend Motherwell, Wishaw South Parish Church, the Miracle Foundation, Lanarkshire Baby Bank, One Parent Families Scotland, North Lanarkshire Council's tackling poverty team, Social Security Scotland, Veterans Community Hub, Autism Take 5, Dallies Community Larder, Lanarkshire Association of Mental Health, and Remploy. That is not all of them; I cut it down quite a bit. Most of the organisations come regularly and they all benefit, and I benefit, particularly from their networking. My constituents are grateful to all of those organisations and I will be visiting many of them during the recess.

To add a wee note, I had scarcely sat down after business questions when I received an email from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities—the Leader of the House’s pointy sword has truly a fabulous reach, as I have been trying to get something done on redundancy modification orders since 2016 and I have got the offer of a meeting with a Minister! [HON. MEMBERS: “Yay!”]

I have been privileged to chair the all-party group on post offices and I want to thank all its members across the House, but I particularly thank Lord Arbutnot and the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) for their wise counsel. The fight for fairness and justice for sub-postmasters and for proper compensation for them after the Horizon scandal is the focus of what we are doing. The continuation of the network is vital for all of us and all our constituents. If and when we continue the network and it continues to grow, we must pay sub-postmasters a decent wage for all that they do in our communities.

I also have had the huge privilege of becoming the Scottish National party Westminster group spokesperson on disabilities. This has been life changing for me: listening to stories of lived experience from constituents and others has sometimes driven me to a mixture of tears and fury at how a country and society as rich as ours treats disabled people. I have heard many Members today talk about what is going to happen if ticket offices close and that is just a small part of this. We should all remember that 20% of the population of this country have a disability, often invisible. The benefits regime is failing those who are unable to work. The cost of living crisis and high energy costs have led to horrendous challenges for disabled people and their families. The Government and we as parliamentarians must continue to fight for our disabled constituents. Disability can come to any of us; we must bear that in mind. Not everyone with a disability was born that way.

I also want to pay tribute to carers who help disabled people, especially the army of unpaid carers who save the economy billions of pounds because of the care they provide to their loved ones on our behalf. I thank all disabled and carers organisations who have helped me raise issues on behalf of constituents and others. Bless them for everything they do.

I also want to thank all the House staff. I am especially grateful to them: they look after me and go way above their job roles. So many times in the last few years I have been so grateful to them for everything they do.

I also want to thank my own team. They have a lot to put up with. [[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) behind me, chuntering from a sedentary position! My constituents are served by some of the best caseworkers and best staff in this place; I will challenge anybody on that.

Gavin Newlands: Will my hon. Friend give way on that?

Marion Fellows: No, I will not. [*Laughter.*]

I thank my staff for putting up with me and my demands on them, but most of all I thank them for the work they do for folk in Motherwell and Wishaw. We all know in this place that we are only as good as those who work for us, and I am quite good—in fact I think I am very good—because of the work they do for me.

Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for your forbearance and for allowing me to talk about the best place and the best constituency across the UK, Motherwell and Wishaw.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): And we all thank the hon. Lady for not taking that intervention from Gavin Newlands.

4.35 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): It is an immense pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), who made a very good speech.

I join other Members in paying tribute to our late colleague Sir David Amess, who is rightly honoured in the title of the debate. He remains much missed in these debates, in which he was such a fixture—he really did own them—and in the day-to-day life of Parliament. I heard what the hon. Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) said about the plaque that will be appearing in this Chamber, which we look forward to seeing. I also want to remember Jo Cox, who was honoured in the Jubilee Room just a few months ago at an event organised by her sister, my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Kim Leadbeater), with her parents in attendance. Our thoughts very much stay with her, too, at these times when we remember colleagues.

On the Opposition Benches, we send our best wishes today to the family of Margaret McDonagh, Baroness McDonagh of Mitcham and Morden, following her funeral yesterday. Margaret was Labour’s first general secretary and later a much respected peer. She was an exceptional general secretary, organising Labour to victory in 1997, and she was an inspirational boss to me and taught me so much as a young election organiser. She set the standard—a very high and exacting standard—for us, to which we still aspire today. She was a Labour organiser’s organiser. I know she will be missed by everyone, especially her sister, my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh); our heart goes out to her. I know that today she would be urging us hard to get out the vote in the by-elections, so we wish good luck to all our candidates and teams who are working so hard. Please vote Labour today!

I apologise to the graduates of the University of South Wales in Newport, who I was meant to be joining this evening to celebrate their graduation. I am sorry I cannot be with them, but I send them huge congratulations.

It is a pleasure to respond to this debate for the Opposition. These debates are always a great opportunity for MPs to raise a whole range of issues that matter to their constituents, demonstrated most ably by the Father of the House, the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), in his speech about his constituent, and repeated by many others. It is too difficult to mention all the points raised by so many Members today, so I would like to use this opportunity to raise some issues close to my constituents’ hearts.

I was struck by the reflection of the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) on the emotional attachment that we often feel to individual constituents’ cases. In my case, it would be the Smith family, who I met many years ago and who were hugely impacted by the contaminated blood scandal. More recently, my constituent Mike Hermanis, a Falklands veteran, brought colleagues to the House to talk to me

[Jessica Morden]

and other MPs about their pleas to have documents from the inquiry into the bombing of the Sir Galahad unsealed. I was deeply moved by his story—that of a young man of 19 from Newport East who has spent most of his life seeking answers to what happened in the days leading up to that bombing. The story of what happened is documented in Crispin Black’s book “Too Thin for a Shroud”, which sheds new light on the events of 8 June 1982, and I would recommend that book to all Members. I look forward to working with colleagues across the House—there is much interest in this—to support him in achieving the closure he seeks, alongside other Falklands veterans.

As the first Member to hold a debate on e-scooters and e-bikes, and on behalf of my constituents and those who raise their antisocial use constantly, may I urge the Government to bring forward a transport Bill or some other legislation to update the law properly to regulate their use? This has been drawn out for far too long. The legislation is clearly lagging behind both their sales and use.

I also offer my massive congratulations to Maindee Primary School, Positive Futures, Community Youth Project Newport and other partners who work with young people in Newport East and across our city on winning the national partnership of the year award at the Levelling the Playing Field scheme awards earlier this week. They are a group of incredible community volunteers, teachers and role models who are a force of nature and deserve every recognition.

This debate is also a chance to reflect on the Government’s record this term. I will just say a few things—there is certainly a lot of material to go on. This is the Government of economic mismanagement, a Government of low growth and high taxes who have failed our industries and our constituents. From the Tory mortgage bombshell that is hitting so many of our constituents hard—[*Interruption.*] It is true, including those 8,500 residents in Newport East who will be paying around £2,300 more on their mortgages, and the hundreds of thousands of others across the country who are struggling due to this Government’s disastrous mini-Budget last autumn. I would just like to quote a youngster from Somerton Primary who wrote to me:

“I’ve been trying to think of ways to help my mum, but she tells me not to. She works extra hours. I am terrified. I get really worried we might lose our house.”

There is no hope with the Conservative party, and while I could go on, in reality, we just need a general election.

Excellent contributions have been made by Members from across the House today, including those made by the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns)—we thank him for his work. He packed a lot into his speech, above all his love of Gateshead and the importance of strong trade unions, and quite rightly highlighted the Government’s woeful record on the asylum system. Ten years ago, 90% of asylum cases were decided in six months; that figure is now 10%. The backlog was 19,000 under the last Labour Government; it is now estimated to be 166,000.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who is fiercely passionate about Swansea East and the communities beyond, is a force of nature on the menopause. I particularly praise her for the Everyone

Deserves campaign, which targets holiday hunger during this cost of living crisis. That gives me the opportunity to give a shout-out to parliamentary friendships, which sustain us all in our role. I am lucky enough to have her as one of mine.

I sympathised with the arguments that the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) made about secondary ticketing. He makes very good points—I say that as the mother of a Swiftie who has been through various traumatic times.

I thank the right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for making some really important points about Bosnia. It is important to highlight that topic, and I hope his arguments were well heeded: he speaks from a position of deep knowledge and experience.

The speech of the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft), in which she mentioned steel, allows me to say yet again in this place—as the hon. Lady did—that we need our steel. We need this Government to step in and do what they can, as other countries are doing across Europe, working in partnership to transition that vital industry and to do so swiftly.

Da iawn, as we say in Wales, to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) for giving a traditional David Amess speech by ably demonstrating her love of her constituency, and by making some really important points about the need to protect private renters and her campaign to ban plastic in wet wipes.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) mentioned policing, which allows me the opportunity to reiterate how important community policing is, how we are still suffering from the cuts that the Government brought in—some 40% was cut from the budget in Gwent under Tory Home Secretaries—and why we really need Labour’s neighbourhood policing plan.

Finally, the hon. Members for Wantage (David Johnston) and for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) mentioned work experience. I have had the huge pleasure of welcoming Bryn, Rachel, Amanda and Tom this summer; I do not know whether I put them off politics at all, but I have really enjoyed having them.

I thank everyone who has participated in today’s debate—I think we are all still recovering from the shock-horror moment when the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) revealed that he would be intervening, rather than taking part. Like other hon. Members, I take this opportunity to wish everyone who works in this place a happy and restful summer recess. There are too many roles to mention here, but I am going to make the mistake of mentioning just one by saying a particular thank you to our Doorkeepers, whose random acts of kindness—they know who they are—sustain many of us who spend a lot of time in this Chamber.

I would also like to thank all those staff who work tirelessly in our constituency offices up and down the country, including my own team. Like the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), I am so grateful to them for putting up with me—not least Dan and Elaine, who have moved on to more exciting things, but also Kath, Sarah, Emma, Gardha and Poppy. Poppy has been lent to us this summer by Yale; she has worked very closely with the Sutton Trust, which I think we should praise in this place, to be able to go to Yale, and she is back helping out in Newport East, which is wonderful.

To all Members of this House, happy working recess—for it is indeed a working recess. Diolch yn fawr, and hwyl fawr, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Diolch yn fawr. I call Jo Churchill.

4.45 pm

The Vice-Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household (Jo Churchill): It is a pleasure to sum up this important debate, which is one of the few occasions when Members from across the House can raise any issue they wish. First, I wish to follow others in paying tribute to Sir David Amess, who was such a kind man. His passion for animals, cheeky smile and love of his constituency and his family are all things that we remember of him, and the tributes today have been incredibly touching, particularly those from my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth), who knew him best.

It has been a wonderful debate and we have been listening to fantastic contributions from Members from across our country. We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross), the hon. Members for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar), the hon. Members for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), and my hon. Friends the Members for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson). We heard a speech from Lincolnshire, from my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh)—a happy birthday, Sir Edward! We heard from those with constituencies nearby, my hon. Friends the Members for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) and for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft), and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), my hon. Friends the Members for Watford (Dean Russell), for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), for Sedgefield (Paul Howell) and for Wantage (David Johnston), the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), and my hon. Friends the Members for Newbury (Laura Farris) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn). Towards the end, we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Southend West, for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) and for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers).

Our United Kingdom is the most successful political and economic union the world has ever seen. It makes us safer, stronger and more prosperous. It makes us better able to share the skills of great institutions that we have heard about today, such as the armed forces, NHS and civil service. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy for mentioning much of that. I apologise if I do not get to respond to everybody, but there was a lot to get through. Mostly, people highlighted how important our work is in changing lives and how we are helped in that work by the teams who support us every day. Charities, councillors and others help to drive and sustain us in helping constituents. That was a theme from north to south, from east to west.

We also heard a little about the ticket offices. Members will know that the Adjournment debate is on that subject, so I will leave those comments in the tender

care of the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), whom I see to my right. Key themes we heard about were health, mental health in children, education and transport—the things that make our community function. We heard of much investment that is driving prosperity and jobs, and about our police now being at a record 149,500 in England and Wales. We have had a wonderful journey around the country this afternoon. I have a lot of it still to see, but much of it gives me hope, in terms of the investment and the progress we are making, helping people's lives.

Alicia Kearns: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Jo Churchill: I am sorry but I have so little time and I will not give way.

I should mention the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) and all the work he does as Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, for which I thank him. I did note what he said about Gibside School and the pilot for the visually impaired children. I heard him championing that being rolled out and I will make sure that that Department knows.

The Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), is no longer in his place, but I took note of his request for a meeting with the police, the CPS and Ministers, and I will make sure that the Department is aware of it.

The doughty hon. Member for Swansea East came next into our lives with all her colourfulness and her work to help women through that different stage of life, the menopause, which was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield. We thank her for her work highlighting it, and the Government have made sure that prepayment certificates have been brought in to make that journey easier for women. I also noted her football tribute to Gareth Bale, which landed well with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East. He pointed out how expanding ULEZ will hit about 200,000 Londoners, when money is tight, how it will go right out to Uxbridge and South Ruislip and how facing charges of £12.50 a day—up to £4,500 a year—is a tough thing for people to afford. I join him in urging the Mayor to step back.

I also join my hon. Friend in wishing success for the Smokefree 2030 ambition—he knows I am keen on that and would love to see us achieve it too. I look forward to his work experience photos. I have had many young people in my office—Teddy came only this week. It is brilliant that they come and see how our democracy works.

We were then taken to the constituency of the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier). I thank her for praising the Home Office, saying that the situation has improved markedly. I am sure everyone will join me in wishing the young lady who has just arrived from Afghanistan well in her new life in Scotland. Please pass on those wishes from us all.

My right hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who is no longer in his place, asked us not to forget the people of Bosnia and the 57 of our men and women who lost their lives. Speeches are always more powerful when they come from a place of personal knowledge, and I am sure that colleagues in the Foreign Office and the MOD heard his

[Jo Churchill]

remarks, and his shout-out to our hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), whom he praised for his good work as trade envoy.

We went over to the constituency of the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), where, I agree, violence against women and girls is completely unacceptable, and then scooted down to Scunthorpe, where my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft) welcomed the £19.4 million funding for one of 111 diagnostic centres that we have created. My hon. Friend is known as “Mrs Steel”, and we know that steel is vital to the UK. Ministers are engaging to make sure it has a positive and sustainable future, and I thank her for all the work she does.

We then went over the water to South Antrim. Our focus remains on delivering for the people of Northern Ireland. I am pleased that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) welcomes the moves to restore the Executive in Stormont; it is our top priority. I know he has regular dialogue with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

We then went to the beautiful Cotswolds. The issue of GL43 and SPA is quite complex, so if my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) will forgive me, I will say only that I noted his comments and they will have been heard by the Department. DEFRA may decide to modify the GL should the situation change. We are aware of some technical changes to the higher level stewardship and have put support in place, but I have asked the Department to look at extending the deadline as my hon. Friend requested.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I thank my hon. Friend on behalf of my farmers, who are very troubled by this, as are farmers up and down the country. It would be really welcome if that were to be put back, even by a few weeks.

Jo Churchill: I note my hon. Friend’s comments.

We then heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Moray, whom I congratulate on his refereeing skills. He gave a shout-out to Steve Clarke and wished his team well. I noted his comments about Viaplay. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, our right hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), is keen to engage with him. Of course, that will be easier if the SNP Government give him the money for the A9. [Laughter.]

Anyway, we move on to Congleton, where we heard about the firm Brit European, whose site is powered by solar, wind and methane from moo poo—that is what I wrote, but I added something in brackets to remind myself what it is. The firm has used those and other innovative solutions to create a sustainable site—it sounds absolutely fantastic, and all power to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton asked for a meeting between the Department for Business and Trade and the company SpanSet, and I will make sure the Department hears that request, but I point out that questions to that Department take place on 14 September.

We whizz to Rutland and Melton, where I am excited about visiting the food market when it is established. I was interested to hear about the medi-hub and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland

and Melton on securing the MRI scanner. We know how much early diagnoses helps us to change the trajectory of these diseases. I also note that she is glad that we have increased fines for fly tipping in rural areas. It is a blight, so doubling the fines to £1,000 is really welcome. She also welcomed the biggest ever funding for education, and I am sure Sir David would have been warmed by the way she trotted us around what I think was about 32 subjects. I am sure that the Ministers in the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero heard her comments.

That brings us to Rayleigh and Wickford. All I can say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford is that friends are so important, and this place is no different. He misses his friend, and we heard that today. I thank him for his kind words. Moving on, I wish him enormous luck with securing his special school. Education for those with particular needs is incredibly important. Every child has the right to a good education. That is why the high needs funding increasing by more than £10 billion, an increase of some 10.6%, is really welcome. I also have a RAAC school and hospital in Bury St Edmunds, so I know some of the challenges involved; I wish him well with that and with his work with his sheltered housing community.

Off we trotted then to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury; she has got herself a knowledge highway bus and now she is cheekily asking for a bridge before she comes back in two years’ time. I am sure the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle, heard her. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury really saved her passion for her comments on CAMHS and children’s mental health and the two-year wait for a diagnosis. We all know how vital it is to have a timely diagnosis and the Government are committed to reducing the delays for those children. It is really important to get a quick diagnosis so that we can help to give children the best education.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend on her comments about chalk streams. They are an incredibly important and special habitat. I know the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), makes a particular play in the chalk stream strategy to ensure that we look after that vital part of nature.

Next, we went to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington, who thanked the Government for the energy bill relief scheme, the household support fund and the uprating of benefits in line with inflation. He painted a very different story from the one we heard from the hon. Member for Newport East, but he did bring up the issue of incineration, and I will ensure that DEFRA hears those comments. He also welcomed the police and the improvements to his St Helier Hospital and the new work—with the Royal Marsden Hospital, I think he said—to see and treat more people suffering from cancer.

Then we went to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington and his celebrations on rail, with £239 million for Bank Top station—

Peter Gibson: It was £139 million.

Jo Churchill: I gave my hon. Friend an extra £100 million, with the Rail Minister sitting here; I could not have timed that more perfectly.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the Brunswick Street campus, where 80% of the jobs are driven by Government funding, helping people to drive prosperity. We all know that work is the way to do that. I thank him for all the work he does on the APPG for hospice and end of life care. The Government recognise the importance of access to high-quality, personalised palliative and end of life care, which means so much to families and patients. I was pleased to see that, as part of the Health and Care Act 2022, palliative care services were added to integrated care boards to help to drive better regional services. *[Interruption.]* I am being chivvied to hurry up and shut up—

The Treasurer of His Majesty's Household (Mr Marcus Jones): By the Whips!

Jo Churchill: Yes—I usually do this bit to other people! I thank those hon. Members to whom I did not get, who all had the same theme of working for their constituencies, driving results, helping people to prosper and making sure that when lives go wrong, they and their teams deliver.

As we rise for summer recess at the close of business, I offer my thanks to all the staff throughout the House, our own staff, the Doorkeepers, the cleaners, the staff in the Tea Room who keep us fed and watered, the Clerks, the catering staff, the police, the security staff, Broadcasting and *Hansard*, who all show amazing commitment and dedication to us, and of course to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the rest of Mr Speaker's team. I wish everybody, including my own team, one of whom has worked here for more than four decades—not continuously for me, I would add—and another of whom came here with me in 2015, a happy, peaceful, safe recess, whether they are at work or play. Let us just remember that Sir David's light remains.

4.59 pm

Ian Mearns: I think I am subject to another Government cut here, Mr Deputy Speaker. *[Laughter.]* This has been a wide-ranging and well-supported parliamentary event, with an oft-repeated theme of ticket office closures, and I am glad that the rail Minister has been here to reflect on some of that. It has been a fitting tribute to the memory of Sir David Amess, and I also need to mention the Member who was not here but who was—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

Mr Deputy Speaker, to you, right hon. and hon. Members across the House, and all the staff who work tirelessly to support the functions of the House and keep us safe, I wish a fantastic and well-deserved summer recess. I wish Members safe journeys back to their constituencies, homes and loved ones.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Before everybody disappears, I just want to say that the spirit of Sir David Amess and his light absolutely shine bright on our proceedings. We all miss him greatly. We all have great memories of Sir David, and his spirit remains here.

I thank all my staff, because they at the frontline and take a lot of the flak before it gets anywhere near us, so we are grateful for them. All the staff who work here,

from the Clerks to the cleaners, from the secretaries to the security, make sure that our democracy works as well as it does.

I want you all to have a superb recess. As president of the Royal Lancashire Agricultural Show, I look forward to welcoming thousands of visitors to the Ribble Valley tomorrow and over the weekend, demonstrating how important rural agriculture is to this country. Have a great recess everybody.

Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Today, by written ministerial statement, the Government made their response to the Kirkup inquiry into avoidable baby deaths in East Kent. The work on that matter in this place has been led by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale), so I want to put on the record, on behalf of the whole east Kent community, our thanks to him for everything he has done to drive this important issue forward. I also thank the Richford family and all those who have shared their grief and their loss so that other families may not be affected by such a tragedy.

As the announcement was by written statement, I would be grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you could advise whether the Government have indicated their intention to bring to the House the matters included in that statement, including a new national body for maternity safety, which I think would be of great interest to the whole House.

I also add to your comments, Mr Deputy Speaker, and thank you, the other deputies, Mr Speaker, the Speaker's team and the House staff for looking after us all so well this parliamentary term.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. I have not been notified that there will be any further statements today, and we have fairly well run out of time. However, I am sure that there will be many more opportunities for this and other issues to be raised when we get back in September.

PETITION

Car Parking Charges

5.3 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): I rise to present a petition to urge a reversal of the decision by Darlington Borough Council to end the provision of two hours' free car parking in our town centre. It has been signed by more than 2,000 people in just a few short weeks, with both the lead petitioner and the seconder owning and running businesses in the town centre.

Since Monday 3 July, people driving into town have faced parking charges, leading to increased costs for residents and putting the viability of our town centre and its traders in jeopardy, with local businesses already reporting a reduction in footfall since the reintroduction of charges. I fully endorse this petition and its content.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the removal of the two hours free car parking in Darlington Town Centre will have a detrimental effect on the local community and on the local economy; further declares that it must be reinstated by Darlington Borough Council.

[Peter Gibson]

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to encourage Darlington Borough Council to U-turn immediately on their decision to re-introduce these car parking charges in Darlington town centre.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002847]

Scunthorpe Station Ticket Office

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Wood.)

5.4 pm

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise the proposed closure of the ticket office at Scunthorpe train station. I waited for an Adjournment debate for several weeks, and two have come along at once. I feel fortunate today.

I thank the Minister for his time today. I know he will be having a busy day, so I am grateful we have the opportunity to talk about this issue. Earlier this month, many Members, including me, received an email from TransPennine Express to tell us that, in conjunction with train operators across the country, it will be consulting on closing a number of ticket offices that it is responsible for staffing and reducing the number of hours that staff are present in stations.

The proposals as they stand are for the entire closure of the ticket office in Scunthorpe station and to change the number of hours that staff will be present in the station. Currently, it is staffed from 5.15 am to 8.15 pm, Monday to Saturday. That will change to 7 am to 2 pm. On Sundays, the current hours of 8.30 am to 8.30 pm will change to 9 am to 4 pm. That is ridiculous. It is a halving of the hours that staff will be there. To be clear, that is completely and entirely unacceptable.

I am particularly concerned about the impact the cuts could have on elderly residents in my constituency. The closure of the ticket office will force people to use the machines or their phones, or to pay for tickets at home using their computer. My understanding is that older travellers are less likely to be digitally connected and to have the know-how to use the machines. I accept that for some it will be fine, but for many it will not. In the absence of a ticket office, they may find themselves stuck. They are also more likely to be dependent on cash. One in five older people relies on cash for payments, according to Age UK, and under these proposals it may not always be possible for people to go into a station and buy a ticket using cash. That cannot be right.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): The Minister will know that I have expressed concerns about the proposed ticket office closure at Darlington. With £139 million of intervention in Darlington station, it seems short-sighted to lose that facility. Does my hon. Friend agree that the needs of disabled people, including those with visual impairment and wheelchair users who cannot reach the screens of ticket machines, will be severely impacted?

Holly Mumby-Croft: My hon. Friend is spot on in his observation. I am also concerned about the impact that the closures could have on disabled people, and that issue has been raised with me by disabled members of my community in Scunthorpe.

According to the UK consumer digital index from Lloyds bank, people with a disability are 35% less likely to have digital skills for life, meaning that in the absence of a ticket office they may be left at a disadvantage. It is just not acceptable that we would make it harder for disabled people to travel around the country.

On top of the difficulty in accessing tickets, the reduction in staffing time is of huge concern. In relation to disabled members of the community and passengers who need extra help, customers with hearing impairments,

for example, may find it difficult to obtain information if staffing hours are reduced, particularly if they rely on lip reading. The screens that have the information up for the trains do not always work.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I can give my hon. Friend a practical example. I used Scunthorpe station last Thursday after attending an event just outside the town. The ticket office was closed. I checked train times before, and everything was running. I got on to the platform, the information board was not working and no train turned up at the due time. People were left scratching their heads, trying to find out the information from their phones. The information has to be readily available for all people, including blind people and the disabled, and I fully support my hon. Friend in her efforts to keep the ticket office open.

Holly Mumby-Croft: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, which we did not even set up.

Ticket machines are, of course, not infallible. They can break, and can take a while to be replaced or repaired. It will simply be more difficult for some passengers to get the best deal possible without having a person there to speak to. I am also concerned about having waiting rooms open without staff supervision, which may make them a magnet for antisocial behaviour—something that we work really hard in Scunthorpe to tackle. We do not want to invite that.

I am not alone in making these objections; they are shared widely by residents in Scunthorpe. Ahead of the debate, and immediately after the proposals were announced, I reached out to my constituents on this issue. We are not backward in coming forward in Scunthorpe, and my constituents have been very clear what their views are. Of the respondents to the survey, an overwhelming 95%—these are broadly people who use the station; we have recorded that information—did not support the closure of the ticket office and the changes to staffing hours.

One of the key issues that respondents highlighted was the importance of recognising the impact that the sole use of ticket machines or online purchase would have on elderly or disabled people. Respondents pointed out that some people might not be able to use the ticket machines or purchase online without assistance, with 37% highlighting customer service. Many stated quite simply that they prefer a face-to-face service and the ability to ask for advice on the quickest routes and make other general inquiries, regardless of what time they are at the station.

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that many of our residents understand that getting people out from behind the screen and on to the platforms would be helpful, but when hours are reduced nobody is there to help residents understand when the trains are coming? In Accrington, we see a lot of delays at our train station, and if nobody is at the ticket office we do not know what will happen next. Does she agree that the reduction in hours is key in this process?

Holly Mumby-Croft: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was quite prepared to be pragmatic about this issue if the reality was that the staff member would be able to help for the exact same number of hours, but that is simply not the case.

Another issue raised by my constituents was safety and security. They said that they were very concerned about solo and elderly travellers, and people travelling late into the evening. Recently, I picked up a family member a couple of times who had been away to do a course and was using the train service to do that. I would not like to think that at 8 o'clock on a winter's night there would be no member of staff at the station.

On its website, TransPennine Express stated:

“This more modern approach to customer service will mean the traditional ticket office is no longer required as our staff will be able to help customers purchase tickets on the concourse”.

In its impact assessment specifically for Scunthorpe, it said that

“customers will experience a more visible staff presence at stations”.

I struggle to understand how that can be the case when the staff will be there for only half the amount of time they are there at the moment. To me, that just sounds like nonsense. They are warm words from TransPennine Express, but you have to get up a little earlier in the morning to sneak something like that past the residents of Scunthorpe.

Scunthorpe ticket office is not unused: nearly 32,000 tickets were sold there last year, and an awful lot of residents rely on its services to buy their train tickets. I know that the decision has been taken by the current TransPennine Express management, but the Government are not fully removed from influence over it. I feel that it is my duty as a constituency MP to represent my constituents' views on this matter, and push the Government to ensure that ticket offices remain open. Closure would undermine the efforts that the Government have made to improve customer service on our railways. This comes after a period when we have received a substandard level of service in Scunthorpe. Closing the ticket office would be an obvious backward step.

I hope that the Minister has taken on board the views of my constituents, and will do all that he can to ensure that we keep ticket offices open. I thank the staff who work at Scunthorpe ticket office. This must be a very worrying and difficult time for them. They do a fantastic job, and my complaints are no reflection on them. They do a wonderful job, and I express my sympathies to them at this time.

5.13 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Huw Merriman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft) on securing this debate on the proposals regarding the Scunthorpe station ticket office. Scunthorpe station, as she stated, is managed by TransPennine trains, which I understand proposes to close all ticket office windows at Scunthorpe station and move staff to other station areas where they are better placed to help passengers buy tickets, to provide advice and to give assistance.

There has been a huge shift in the way passengers purchase tickets. Nearly half of all ticket sales in rail are made online. Around one in every 10 transactions took place at a ticket office in 2022-23, down from one in three a decade earlier, equal to 13% of rail revenue. I understand from TransPennine trains that statistics for Scunthorpe station reflect this position, with 11% of transactions from Scunthorpe station being made from the ticket office. The figures that have been supplied to me show that is equivalent to 59 transactions per day from the ticket office.

[*Huw Merriman*]

It is important that industry takes steps to modernise the passenger experience, by moving staff out from ticket offices to be more visible and accessible around the station. These reforms will bring our stations in tune with what customers expect from other modern and responsive services, including supermarkets and banks, where customer assistants help with information and support, and help make digital transactions on the shop floor.

I welcome the fact that the rail industry has started this process by launching consultations on the future of ticket offices, under the ticketing and settlement agreement process. That process sets out a well-established mechanism that train operators must follow when proposing major changes to ticket office opening hours, including closures.

Holly Mumby-Croft: Does my hon. Friend agree that a member of staff can be more visible only if they are physically in the station? It is impossible for a member of staff to assist a passenger buying a ticket from a ticket machine if they are not there.

Huw Merriman: The aim is a redeployment aim, as I understand it from the train operator, but I take the point with regard to hours. My hon. Friend will be aware that I just set out the process. This is a consultation process. Ultimately, it falls back to the passenger groups, who represent passengers, to discuss these proposals with each train operator. If they are not satisfied that, for example, the accessibility requirements will be met, which has to be legally met, they will rescope those changes. If they are not agreed by the train operator and the passenger group feels it needs to be taken further, it will be for the Secretary of State to determine. Her point is well made; I will just leave it there, given this is a live consultation.

Train operators began the passenger consultations on 5 July. This is an industry-led process, with each train operator managing its own station-by-station consultation. I understand my hon. Friend is particularly concerned about the impact of the changes on elderly and disabled passengers. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) made the same point. As part of the ticketing and settlement agreement process, train operators must set out the improvements or alternatives they propose to put in place to support the needs of passengers, and include that in the notice sent to the other operators and the passenger bodies, to which I just referred.

Each operator's approach must take into consideration the potential impact on individuals with accessibility needs. I recognise that not everyone has access to a smart phone or the internet, and that some passengers will prefer to use cash or to speak to a member of staff. This week, I met with accessibility groups again, to hear their views directly and to encourage them to work with the train operators to help shape these ideas. I also met with the train operators this week, and reiterated the need to ensure proposals worked for every passenger.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): ScotRail looked at this, in terms of ticket office hours and whatnot, last year. After the consultation, it rowed back from the idea; it was going to close only

three ticket offices and to reduce a lot of hours. The Minister said that each operator is looking at individual stations, but I am a little confused. I travel from Glasgow Central on a regular basis. Avanti has plans to close the Glasgow Central ticket office. Even a small percentage of those tickets—the queues go literally from the platform to outside the station—is quite a lot of tickets. The LNER has chosen not to close the Edinburgh Waverley ticket office. With broadly similar ratios in ticket sales, why is one closing and the other still open? What is the difference between them?

Huw Merriman: It is certainly the case that a number of stations are not part of the proposed closures. Just over 70 ticket offices will remain open. Another example is Manchester, where the ticket office at Manchester Piccadilly will not remain open, if these proposals are followed through, but Victoria and Oxford Road ticket offices will remain open. Given that the hon. Member is also the SNP shadow transport spokesperson, I will do him the honour of writing to him so I can set out in more detail exactly why one station has been chosen over another and the methodology. Indeed, perhaps I can put that in the Library for all to read.

As modern ticketing and payment methods are rolled out more widely, we will work with industry to ensure that everyone remains able to buy a ticket. Staff will be available to provide additional support to those who need and want it, including by helping passengers to use ticket machines and providing the type of assistance that my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) said occurs under the current system. In the event that suitable tickets cannot be purchased from the station of departure, passengers will not be expected to travel out of their way to buy a ticket, and will be able to buy en route or at their final destination.

Holly Mumby-Croft: For a lot of people there is a great deal of anxiety about the idea of getting on a train and going somewhere when they do not have a ticket in their hand or on their phone. I am probably bolshie enough to get on the train and hope I can sort it out somewhere along the journey, but many people will not be. If that change needs to go ahead, it needs to be widely publicised and people need to be given the confidence to be able to travel in that way.

Huw Merriman: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is certainly uppermost in my mind that there will need to be additional training. Forty-three per cent of all stations currently do not have a ticket office, and it is perfectly possible for passengers from those stations to travel, as they do now. Sometimes ticket machines are not operating; at that particular juncture, the staff on the train will be aware of the situation and will act accordingly. On the trains I use, I am used to people getting on board and saying, "I've been unable to purchase a ticket. Can I purchase one?" and in all my years I have never experienced any response but, "Yes, that's absolutely fine," rather than going down the penalty fare route. My hon. Friend makes a good point, though, and I will make sure it is followed up.

Peter Gibson: Will the Minister give way?

Huw Merriman: I will, and then I will make a little progress.

Peter Gibson: I want to raise a point related to his comments about moving staff out of the ticket office on to the platform to provide assistance. At Darlington station, the ticket machines are in front of the barriers. I urge him to make sure that, where staff are moved out from behind the counter, they are on the right side of the ticket barriers so that they can provide assistance. I make one further point with regard to the time: an app can provide people with the opportunity to purchase before a train leaves the station.

Huw Merriman: My hon. Friend has made some good points today, including about the design process. I encourage hon. Members to continue to come up with the examples of where things need to work better. Ninety-nine per cent of all tickets are available from ticket machines or online, but that means that 1% are not. I am working at pace to increase that number. My hon. Friend is right about the whereabouts and location of staff; they need to be there so that passengers can buy the ticket and then access the barriers. We will follow that through, and I encourage him also to continue to come up with examples.

Some operators are proposing changes to staffed hours at stations, such as TransPennine's proposal for Scunthorpe station, as mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Scunthorpe and for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe). TransPennine has told me that it is clear in its consultation that all currently staffed stations will remain staffed, but I take the point about the hours. I reiterate to my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe the point about the consultation process and the appeals process, should an appeal need to be made.

Martin Vickers *rose*—

Huw Merriman: I have stirred my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes from his place.

Martin Vickers: If we take at face value what the train companies are saying—that this is an effort to save money—and they are moving staff out of the ticket office on to the platform, is the Minister reassured by them that there will be a saving?

Huw Merriman: There will of course be some members of staff who will not wish to make that journey, as their job changes to being multi-skilled and multifaceted within the station as opposed to solely working behind the ticket office. In such cases, where there are a number of ticket office staff available, perhaps one may come out and do that multifaceted role, but the other two may not wish to go on that journey. That may be an issue for them and the station. I recognise, though, that Members have highlighted the challenge of situations in which only one staff member is present and perhaps the hours are not exactly the same. I refer again to the live consultation: that should be fed back. People will be aware of the appeals process because I have just detailed it, and we will of course see what occurs at the end of the process.

I hope I am not repeating myself when I say that passengers will remain able to secure staff assistance and will continue to have access to station facilities such as waiting rooms and toilets as currently provided.

Holly Mumby-Croft: Is the Minister concerned about the possible risk of antisocial behaviour if we move from having staffed stations to unstaffed periods of time in the evenings, which is what is proposed in Scunthorpe?

Huw Merriman: The London underground moved from having ticket-office staff to the type of model I am describing, and I do not believe there was any impact vis-à-vis antisocial behaviour. Again, I encourage my hon. Friend to put forward such points. There will of course be engagement and there is a requirement to meet thresholds to ensure that groups with characteristics are looked after and that we do not increase antisocial behaviour. I encourage her to follow up on those points, which I assure her I have raised myself.

My hon. Friend referred to station safety following the reform. The UK's rail network is one of the safest in Europe and we will never compromise the safety of passengers on our railways. As the industry takes forward vital reforms, safety remains a top priority for all, and certainly for me. It is expected that moving staff out of ticket offices will make them more visible to passengers, and I hope that it will enhance safety when members of staff are on the platform.

Holly Mumby-Croft: Will the Minister give way?

Huw Merriman: I will give way one more time—my hon. Friend is working hard.

Holly Mumby-Croft: I am so grateful to the Minister. I do not mean to be flippant, but I should point out that although moving staff out from ticket offices may make them more visible, moving them entirely out of the station, so that they are not there, certainly will not. I am particularly worried about periods of time when there will no longer be staff at the station.

Huw Merriman: I hear my hon. Friend's point. I refer, of course, to the fact that there is a consultation. I hope she appreciates the argument I am making that while the staff are there, if they are away from the ticket office and on the frontline, they are accessible, can give information and can make people more secure. She made the point that, if there is a reduction in hours, there will not be a member of staff there. I refer again to the feedback to the consultation, but I absolutely take that point. I do not want to pre-empt anything in respect of the outcome, but her voice is heard in the Chamber and her points are on the record.

Mr Deputy Speaker no doubt wants me to wrap up, so I should get to the end of my speech. I encourage my hon. Friend, all right hon. and hon. Members, and all constituents to respond to the consultation, and I will encourage TransPennine trains and all other operators to take those responses into account as they finalise their approaches. The consultations provide the opportunity to scrutinise the train operating company proposals to ensure that they will work for passengers. Passengers will be able to find out more about the proposals at their local station or online. If passengers want to raise views, they can contact the relevant passenger body, London TravelWatch or Transport Focus. The passenger bodies will consider any feedback from the public on the ticket office proposals. I will meet them shortly to ensure that they have the resources to fulfil their important role.

I believe that the industry's proposed reforms should enable staff to provide a more flexible, agile and personal service. I reiterate that my hon. Friend should encourage her constituents to engage in the consultation process

[*Huw Merriman*]

for Scunthorpe station ticket office, as that is the best way to ensure that their views are considered. Once again, I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate on station ticket offices. I wish you, Mr Deputy Speaker, a wonderful summer, and thank all the staff in this great place, including the police who keep us secure. I wish everyone—all the officials who work across Whitehall as well as all our great people inside this building—a wonderful summer. I will be spending three weeks on the railway, following in the footsteps of Michael Portillo, although without the dress sense. I will be looking at

what our wonderful railway does and all the people who work on it. I look forward to spending my August with the great railway community.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Let me know when you get to Clitheroe, won't you? I will now put the Question for the last time before the summer recess.

Question put and agreed to.

5.29 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 20 July 2023

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Departmental Update

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kemi Badenoch): I am pleased to provide the House with the following updates from the Department for Business and Trade today.

United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (Services Exclusions) Regulations 2023 in accordance with section 18(10) of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020

This statement is made in accordance with section 18(10)^[1] of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (“the UKIM Act”). The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (Services Exclusions) Regulations 2023 (“the regulations”) amend the list of services contained in schedule 2 to that Act to which the market access principles in part 2 of the UKIM Act do not apply.

The changes to the services exclusions under schedule 2 are being made following a public consultation held in February to May 2021. In line with section 18(8) of the UKIM Act, consent of the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers, and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland to the making of the regulations has been sought. If that consent is not given within one month of the request, the regulations may be made without that consent, in accordance with section 18(9).

One month has passed and I have not received consent from all the devolved Administrations, although Welsh Ministers have consented to the making of these regulations. These regulations are important to ensuring that the scope of application of the market access principles in part 2 of the UKIM Act better reflects how services are currently regulated across the UK. I therefore intend to proceed with making the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (Services Exclusions) Regulations 2023. My officials have worked closely with their counterparts in the devolved Administrations throughout this process.

^[1] Regulation 18(10) states that “if regulations are made in reliance on subsection (9), the Secretary of State must publish a statement explaining why the Secretary of State decided to make the regulations without the consent of the authority or authorities concerned.”

Canada trade negotiations update

The sixth round of UK-Canada free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations began on 26 June and concluded on 30 June. Similar to previous rounds, this was conducted in a hybrid fashion with some UK officials travelling to Ottawa for negotiations and others attending virtually.

Technical discussions were held across 26 policy areas over 78 separate sessions. They included detailed discussions on treaty text.

Both parties built on the momentum from agreeing in principle UK accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership in March 2023. The negotiations continue to reflect our shared ambition to secure progressive deal which strengthens our existing trading relationship, already worth over £24.8 billion in the year to Q3 2022.

The Government remain clear that any deal we sign will be in the best interests of the British people and the United Kingdom economy. We will not compromise on our high environmental, public health, animal welfare and food standards, and we will maintain our right to regulate in the public interest. We are also clear that during these negotiations, the national health service and the services it provides are not on the table.

The Government will continue to keep Parliament updated as these negotiations progress.

Contingencies Fund advance

The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill will reform the operations of Companies House by setting out new objectives for the Registrar of Companies, including additional powers to query and amend the register where it is suspected that there is fraud or error, as well as scope to proactively share intelligence on criminal activity across Government to combat economic crime. These provisions will help Companies House do more to tackle criminals, terrorists and corruption, strengthening the UK’s reputation as a place where legitimate business can thrive, whilst driving dirty money out of the country.

The legislation enables further investigation and enforcement activity to be undertaken against corporate entities. In readiness for this responsibility we propose to ensure we have the right staff and systems in place to deliver the registrar’s new powers.

Parliamentary approval for additional resource of £1,100,000 and capital of £1,781,000 for this new service will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department for Business and Trade. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £2,881,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS990]

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Update

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Alex Burghart): The Minister of State, Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG, has today made the following statement:

I would like to update hon Members on the main items of business undertaken by my Department in advance of Summer Recess.

Strengthening ethics and integrity in central government

The Government are announcing today a wide-ranging programme of reform to strengthen ethics and integrity in central Government.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has today laid in Parliament the Government full response to the Upholding Standards in Public Life report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the report by Nigel Boardman into the development and use of supply chain finance (and associated schemes) related to Greensill Capital in Government, and the propriety of governance in light of Greensill report from the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

This statement follows the reforms announced to the House in the written ministerial statement “Government Transparency and Accountability” of 15 July 2022, and concludes the Government obligations under the motion passed by the House on 7 June 2022, *Official Report*, column 728.

The Government are also accepting the three recommendations of Adam Heppinstall KC to review conflicts of interests guidance, consider advice on handling potential conflicts

between candidates and Ministers, and consider whether changes are needed to the relevant section of the governance code on public appointments.

In addition to their response to these recommendations, the Government are also delivering further reforms to the business appointment rules beyond the scope of these reports, to both improve the experience for applicants and ensure a more consistent, risk-based approach. As part of this work, the Government will also be integrating into legally binding agreements its other obligations on former office-holders and employees, namely the Radcliffe Rules on books and memoirs, and the rules on the return of, and access to, papers from time in office.

These reforms to the Government's ethics and integrity framework sit alongside the ongoing obligation on all office-holders to uphold their relevant codes of conduct, including the Civil Service Code, the Special Adviser Code of Conduct, the Ministerial Code, and the Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies.

Government transparency and accountability

Since 2010, the Government have been at the forefront of opening up data to allow Parliament, the press and the media to hold public bodies to account.

Transparency is crucial to delivering value for money, cutting waste and inefficiency, and ensuring every pound of taxpayers' money is spent in the best possible way.

The Government will continue to look at how the range of information published by the Government can be improved and made as useful as possible to the public, press and parliament. The following subject areas include documents and information that the Government is due to publish.

Ministerial transparency

The Government will today be publishing the list of ministerial responsibilities on gov.uk. Copies will also be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses in Parliament. The list includes details of ministerial Departments, the Ministers within each Department, their portfolio responsibilities and private offices and the Executive agencies within each Department.

Departments will also be publishing routine transparency data on Ministers' gifts, hospitality, overseas travel and external meetings for the period of January to March 2023. This data covers the returns for the Prime Minister, Government Chief Whip and the Leaders of the House of Commons and the Lords, as well as the Cabinet Office. Government previously published this data on 30 March, for the period of October to December 2022.

Transparency on special advisers

Special advisers are a critical part of the team supporting Ministers. They add a political dimension to the advice and assistance available to Ministers while reinforcing the impartiality of the permanent civil service by distinguishing the source of political advice and support.

Special advisers are temporary civil servants, and their costs are met by the Government Department in which they are based. Each year, the Cabinet Office publishes a report on the cost and number of special advisers across Government. Today, the Cabinet Office will be laying and publishing its report for the previous financial year, April 2022 to March 2023, which also contains a list of special advisers in post as of the end of the reporting period.

Departments will also be publishing routine quarterly data on special advisers' gifts, hospitality and meetings with senior media figures.

Transparency on senior civil servants

The Cabinet Office is also, today, publishing details of all Cabinet Office senior civil servants who hold outside employment for 2022-23, which is paid or otherwise remunerated, and has been approved in line with the requirements of 4.3.4 of the civil service management code.

Routine quarterly data on senior officials' hospitality, expenses and meetings, along with business appointment rules advice, will also be published by Departments today.

Public appointments order in council

Yesterday, His Majesty the King's Privy Council approved a refresh of the public appointments Order in Council, which lists the public bodies regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The order was last updated in 2019.

As well as amending the schedule to reflect newly created, renamed or dissolved regulated public bodies since its last update, the changes take account of the machinery of government departmental changes announced by the Prime Minister earlier this year, and make an addition to the commissioner's remit of the appointment of non-executive directors to the boards of ministerial Departments, in line with the Committee on Standards in Public Life's recommendations.

[HCWS992]

Supporting Civil Service Impartiality through Due Diligence Guidance

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Jeremy Quin): This Government are committed to protecting free speech, the impartiality of the civil service and ensuring taxpayer money is not used to fund speakers who have expressed or supported extremist views.

I have instructed the Cabinet Office to review and update cross-civil service diversity network due diligence and impartiality guidance and the Cabinet Office guidance on learning and events in the Cabinet Office. I expect the guidance to be reissued in the early autumn but have withdrawn the current guidance until that review is complete.

Given that this guidance has been the subject of previous parliamentary interest I wished to inform the House.

Ministers and MPs on all sides of the House have an obligation to help support the impartiality of the civil service. I believe we also have a role in ensuring civil servants are provided with support so that they can be reassured that in organising taxpayer funded or supported events they have taken appropriate steps to prevent that impartiality being called into question.

For this reason guidance was developed to help avoid civil servants (acting on behalf of cross-Government diversity networks) or Cabinet Office officials issuing invitations to individuals or organisations who have expressed or supported extremist views being advertised as speakers at taxpayer funded or supported events, which might lead to the impartiality of the civil service being called into question or its reputation otherwise brought into disrepute.

It has become apparent that the issued guidance may have been adapted for utilisation in areas for which purpose it was not intended and may also be at risk of being misinterpreted by implementing bodies outside of the Cabinet Office. It is important that we protect civil service impartiality but not in a way that could result in adverse unintended consequences. I am equally committed to protecting free speech and I have considered the way in which the guidance has been implemented.

For that reason I have decided to withdraw the current guidance, review it and reissue it in the early autumn having ensured that the guidance strikes the right balance in the way it supports our civil service colleagues in protecting the service's impartiality.

I remain committed to issuing guidance that protects both free speech and the impartiality of the civil service, whilst ensuring taxpayers are not funding speakers who have expressed or supported extremist views. These are not mutually exclusive goals. I will place any updated guidance in the House of Commons Library upon its issuance.

[HCWS991]

DEFENCE

Military Support to Ukraine

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):

I am pleased to provide the House with an update on our military support to Ukraine, including equipment and ammunition provided, deployed personnel, and our training programmes.

Since Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion the UK has donated significant quantities of military equipment, ammunitions and non-lethal aid to Ukraine to help defend its territory and expel Russian invaders. In total, the UK has spent £2.3 billion on our support between April 2022 and March 2023 and has been a leading international donor of military aid to Ukraine, second only to the United States.

Due to the urgent nature of Ukraine's needs, and volume of support required, the UK has obtained equipment to aid it from multiple sources, including:

- UK defence stocks;
- Rapid procurement from defence industry in the UK and overseas;
- Purchasing surplus equipment from foreign governments;
- Co-ordinated international procurement through the UK-administered International Fund for Ukraine.^[1]

In the interests of national security, the origins of some equipment or the procurement routes involved cannot be disclosed. I must also consider the impact on Ukraine of releasing such information. However, in the interests of as full a disclosure as possible, the quantities of equipment and supplies obtained via these sensitive routes have been combined with those from less sensitive sources and amalgamated to show the totality of equipment provided in the table below.

The data below was last provided to the House in this format on 21 July 2022.^[2] As I noted then, the delivery and provision of aid is dynamic and fast moving, responding to the priority needs of the armed forces of Ukraine. While in a small number of areas (notably anti-structure munitions and small arms) we have delivered less than anticipated, we have exceeded plans in critical capability areas such as artillery, responding with agility to Ukraine's priorities and developments on the battlefield. For example, we have delivered over 15 times the quantity of artillery ammunition originally planned (over 200,000 compared to plans of 16,000 shells a year ago).

This table covers confirmed deliveries up to 11 July 2023 (all figures are approximate, unless shown in bold typeface).

<i>Major Capabilities</i>	<i>Weapons/ Launchers</i>	<i>Ammunition</i>	<i>Other Aid</i>
Anti-air	100	>1,500	
Anti-armour	100	>12,000*	

Anti-structure		>2,500
Anti-personnel (including small arms, mortars, grenades)	4,000	5,000,000
Anti-ship		100
Artillery	120	200,000
Main Battle Tanks	14	>4,000
<i>Communications</i>		
Long & short-range radios		1,750
Satellite communications kits		200
<i>Electronic Warfare Systems</i>		
Jamming & anti-jamming electronic systems		300
Physical counters / Decoys		100
<i>Equipment Support</i>		
Spare parts, tools, support kits		£4,000,000
<i>Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance (ISR) Systems</i>		
Laser Designator		300
Optical (inc Uncrewed Aerial Systems)		200
Radar		10
<i>Life Support</i>		
Rations		70,000
Medical supplies (pallets)		200
Clothing		65,000
Night vision devices / Thermal imaging		5,000
Sleeping		10,000
<i>Mobility</i>		
Armoured and protected mobility vehicles		300
Ambulances / Emergency Vehicles		40
Helicopters		3
Soft skinned (inc logistics vehicles)		140
<i>Personal Protective Equipment</i>		
Ballistic Vest		12,000
Helmet		80,000

* Includes single use weapons and unguided munitions.

Deployed personnel

We re-opened our defence section in April 2022, under the defence attaché, to better understand and support our Ukrainian partners with the most urgent requirements for their defence against Russia's ongoing illegal and unprovoked invasion. This includes personnel to ensure the defence section can work in a safe and secure manner that does not unduly burden our hosts.

We continue our long-standing Operation Orbital, which before Russia's invasion on the 24 February 2022 had delivered training to more than 22,000 armed forces of Ukraine personnel in Ukraine. It now includes defence medical personnel, who are delivering training and mentoring in Ukraine to the armed forces of Ukraine medical services.

For operational reasons, which the House will know well, we will not comment on the number of UK personnel in Ukraine, or their locations.

Training support

In addition to the capabilities listed and support in country, the UK has provided comprehensive support to ensure that Ukrainian personnel have the skills, knowledge and training required to safely and effectively

operate the equipment and munitions provided. This includes technical, engineering and combat training for those who will maintain and operate the equipment on the battlefield, alongside technical manuals translated into Ukrainian. For example, we provided a comprehensive programme of Sea King training in the UK for 10 Ukrainian crews and associated engineers. Also, alongside the granting of a squadron of Challenger 2 tanks, Ukrainian tank crews undertook training in the UK to learn the specifics of operating Challenger 2 as well as combined arms training focused on ensuring the tanks could be used to the greatest effect as part of a complete armoured formation. Such training and support has been provided for a number of the major platforms and weapons systems provided.

Other UK-led specialist training for the armed forces of Ukraine has included medical, marine and chaplaincy training. In addition, the UK supports Ukraine's ambition to fly fourth-generation combat aircraft as part of a modern, capable air force and is therefore working with F16-operating nations to deliver a training pipeline for Ukrainian fast jet pilots. The UK will be ready to commence initial training for the first intake of Ukrainian student pilots this summer.

The UK has also played a leading role in providing generalist training for Ukrainian personnel. This has included over 18,700 personnel who have undergone basic and junior leadership training since the programmes were established in June 2022. With support from international allies, the UK anticipates training up to 20,000 personnel this year. The training course, which is based on the UK's basic infantry training, is delivered over a five-week period and includes weapons handling, trench and urban warfare, battlefield first aid, fieldcraft, patrol tactics and the legal principles of armed conflict, giving Ukrainian volunteers the battlefield skills to defend their country from Russian aggression.

We will not stand by as the Kremlin persists in its disregard for the sovereignty of Ukraine and international law. The UK remains firm in its support of Ukraine's right of self-defence in the face of Russian aggression.

^[1] Since IFU-related aid is not solely funded by the UK, but co-funded by the IFU donors (currently UK, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and Lithuania), that aid is not included in the table.

^[2] <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-07-21/hcws259>

[HCWS987]

EDUCATION

Schools Update

The Secretary of State for Education (Gillian Keegan): I have been working closely with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women and Equalities on guidance for schools and colleges when a child is questioning their gender.

We have always said that this is about safety for children. It is a difficult and sensitive area and more information is needed about the long-term implications of a child acting as though they are the opposite sex. We also need to take care to understand how such actions affect other children in the school or college. These decisions must not be taken lightly or in haste.

It is vital that the guidance we publish gives clarity for schools and colleges and reassurance for parents. So we have made the decision to allow more time—to speak to teachers, parents, lawyers and other stakeholders—in order to ensure this guidance meets the high expectations that these groups rightly have for it.

In the meantime, schools and colleges should proceed with extreme caution. They should always involve parents in decisions relating to their child, and should not agree to any changes that they are not absolutely confident are in the best interests of that child and their peers. They should prioritise safeguarding by meeting their existing legal duties to protect single sex spaces and maintain safety and fairness in single sex sport.

I want to give reassurance of how seriously we are taking this issue, and will endeavour to keep the House updated ahead of any developments.

[HCWS983]

TREASURY

Consultation on tax incentives for occupational health

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Jeremy Hunt): The Government are consulting on the case for further support through the tax system to encourage greater employer provision of occupational health services, as a means of reducing labour market inactivity in the UK. The Government are also consulting separately on wider interventions to incentivise investment in and provision of occupational health and longer-term options to boost the workforce capacity to meet increased demand. Together these consultations will inform the Government approach to supporting occupational health provision and supporting individuals to remain and thrive in work.

The consultation is available on gov.uk.

[HCWS988]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust: Independent Review

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): I wish to inform the House of the Government's full response to the report of the independent review into the maternity and neonatal services at East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust, which will be published today on gov.uk.

NHS England commissioned Dr Bill Kirkup CBE in February 2022 to undertake this review following concerns about the quality and outcomes of care. This inquiry was published in October 2022 with five recommendations for the healthcare system.

I want once again to express my thanks for the role the families have played in this review. I remain deeply sorry for the harm and pain that have been a result of the failings of the trust to provide safe care and treatment.

The Government informed the House of their interim response on 7 March 2023, and the fuller response published today sets out in detail how each recommendation is being implemented.

This response has been informed by extensive engagement with stakeholders from across the healthcare system and voluntary sector as well as by the insight and views from those families I met with in June, for which I am grateful.

While the issues set out by Dr Kirkup were a result of an investigation into one trust, many will resonate across the wider system. That is why our response sets out the existing work that is already underway to drive forward system-wide improvements, such as the implementation of the three-year delivery plan that was published in March 2023 by NHS England. This plan is clear on how maternity and neonatal care will be made safer, more personalised, and more equitable for women, babies and families. It will be an important supporting role in the implementation of the East Kent recommendations, and we recognise there is more that we can do.

Today, I want to draw the attention of the House to the key new action we are taking that will create the conditions needed in order for the improvements to be successful and sustainable.

I will chair the new national oversight group to bring together the key people from the NHS and other organisations to look across maternity and neonatal improvement programmes and the implementation of recommendations from this and other maternity reviews. At a local level in East Kent, I will convene a local forum bringing together the NHS, the Care Quality Commission and Members of Parliament whose constituents have been affected to share information and updates. I am also pleased to announce that Dr Kirkup has been appointed to support Government action in relation to recommendations 2 and 3.

It is with a firm determination that we must learn the lessons from this inquiry, as well as those before it, to implement meaningful change to prevent further inquiries into failings in maternity and neonatal services across England being needed.

[HCWS981]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Public Safety Updates

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):

College of Policing Codes of Practice

The Government are today laying two important and significant codes of practice concerning the vetting of police officers and police information and records management. Both codes of practice have been drafted by the College of Policing following extensive public and stakeholder consultation. In accordance with my responsibilities under Section 39A of the Police Act 1996,¹ I have authorised both codes to be laid before Parliament.

The vetting code of practice 2023 replaces the previous 2017 code, strengthening the standards that forces are expected to adhere to when vetting their officers and staff. This work was completed at the request of the Home Secretary in response to the concerning findings of the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection into vetting, counter-corruption and misogyny last year as well as recent high-profile cases of police misconduct and criminality.

Chief officers must have due regard to the code in discharging their functions to which the code relates. The revised code makes it clear that the expectation is on chief officers to ensure vetting standards are maintained within their force. The code includes clarification that an inability to hold minimum vetting clearance will result in dismissal proceedings, as well as emphasising that vetting clearance will be reviewed following the conclusion of misconduct proceedings which do not result in dismissal. It also sets the requirement for a full rationale to be recorded where vetting is granted with conditions, withdrawn or declined; ensuring that decision making is appropriately documented.

In addition to revising the vetting code of practice, the College of Policing is also in the process of updating the accompanying vetting authorised professional practice (APP), as well as overhauling the police code of ethics.

The code of practice for police information and records management replaces the existing code of practice for management of police information (2005), and details key principles for the management of all police information and records and reflects related legislative developments such as those relating to data protection. It will mean that a broader range of police records are retained by forces in the future, meaning there is less risk of losing important records for future scrutiny.

This code has been developed in response to recommendations made in the Hillsborough Independent Panel (HIP) report and Bishop James Jones's report titled "The patronising disposition of unaccountable power" A report to ensure the pain and suffering of the Hillsborough families is not repeated", which highlighted that previously vital records relating to Hillsborough could have been destroyed and would not have been available to the HIP. The introduction of the code will mean that more police records will be retained than in the past, thereby addressing concerns expressed in both reports that the management of police records and information was variable and inconsistent.

The new code of practice is supported by complementary APP titled "Archiving of records in the public interest", which provides specific guidance aimed at information management practitioners that defines the types of records that may be in the public interest and which forces should seek to preserve.

I am grateful to the college for its work in developing these codes and to the various organisations that provided input as part of their development or via consultation.

The codes have been laid before Parliament and are also available on the gov.uk website.

10-year drugs plan—First Annual Report

In December 2021 we published our landmark cross-Government drugs strategy, "From harm to hope". Drug misuse costs society almost £22 billion a year and affects individuals, communities and drives crime. The strategy included over £3 billion of funding between 2022 and 2025 to break drug supply chains, deliver a world-class treatment and recovery system and achieve a generational shift in the demand for drugs. The delivery of the strategy is a whole-of-Government effort and I would like to thank the Ministers and Departments involved for their hard work and determination in delivering this collaborative effort.

In my capacity as the Combating Drugs Minister, I am pleased to announce the publication of our first annual report. The report sets out the good progress

that has been made across Government during the first year of funding and delivery of the strategy in 2022-23, as well as the delivery challenges we have faced and how we have a plan to overcome them. It also sets out how we will measure our progress through our new national outcomes framework. This work lays the foundations for future success in tackling drugs over the lifecycle of the strategy.

In this first year, we have made excellent progress in disrupting drugs supply chains and tackling exploitative and violent drug distribution models. We have closed over 1,300 county lines and led nearly 3,000 major or moderate disruptions of organised crime groups supplying drugs in our communities, and made over 2,600 arrests. Our Project ADDER sites have supported nearly 26,000 arrests since January 2021, with just over 12,000 arrests in the last year.

We have continued to detect and seize drugs both at the UK border and inland, our latest published data on drugs seizures shows that, in the year ending March 2022, the quantity of cocaine seized by police and Border Force rose by over two thirds from the previous year to nearly 19 tonnes. This is the largest amount of cocaine seized in a single year on record. We are clear that we must maintain and build on the good progress made in tackling supply to date.

We are further building our treatment and recovery system, and to do this we have allocated additional funding of £96 million for 2022-23 and £155 million for 2023-24. We have recruited over 1,600 additional staff across the sector, upskilled staff and are ensuring there are clear pathways into treatment for those who need it, including for those in the criminal justice system to reduce the drug-related crime that blights our neighbourhoods. We have expanded the individual placement and support (IPS) scheme to 26 new areas to help people in recovery from drug dependence into employment, doubled the number of incentivised substance free living units in prisons and recruited staff to improve continuity of drug treatment for prison leavers.

We have established 106 combating drugs partnerships across England, each led by a senior responsible owner, to bring services together to drive multi-agency delivery of the strategy at a local level.

While we want to ensure that people who suffer from drug dependence are given the support they need to turn their lives around, we continue to do all that we can to deter people from taking drugs in the first place. We are ensuring that there is a zero-tolerance approach to drug misuse by law enforcement and that those who take drugs face the consequences, with an escalatory regime for those who continue to misuse drugs. We have launched five test and learn projects as part of our cross-Government innovation fund focused on reducing drug use.

These achievements are the first stages of a 10-year journey that demonstrates this Government's ongoing commitment to tackling drug misuse, and I look forward to bringing future reports to this House.

The annual report has been laid before Parliament as a Command Paper (CP 906) and will be available on gov.uk.

Consultation on PACE Code A Changes

The Government are today launching a consultation on revisions to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Code of Practice A. Our objective is to

reflect the new powers introduced in the Public Order Act 2023. This includes extending suspicionless stop and search powers for protest-related offences and communicating a suspicionless stop and search authorisation. Separately, we will also update PACE Code A to introduce a new data collection requirement and amending the Serious Violence Reduction Order pilot start date.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) introduced a legislative framework for the powers of police officers in England and Wales to combat crime. PACE code A deals with the statutory provisions governing stop and search. These include the power to search a person or vehicle without first making an arrest and the necessity for the police to record every stop or encounter. While the suspicion-led powers introduced by the Public Order Bill are covered by existing provisions in PACE code A, PACE code A needs to be amended to implement the new suspicionless stop and search powers for protest-related offences introduced by the Public Order Act 2023.

Specifically, revisions to code A will introduce the following changes:

A new set of paragraphs which introduce suspicionless searches under section 11 of the Public Order Act 2023.

A clause on forces communicating the authorisation of suspicionless searches for protests where it is operationally beneficial to do so.

A clause on forces communicating the authorisation of suspicionless searches under section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) 1994 where it is operationally beneficial to do so.

A new paragraph which introduces a data recording requirement. Additional self-defined ethnic classification categories in annex B.

A change to the SVRO pilot start date in annex G clause 2 from "00:00 17 January 2023 to 23:59 on 17 July 2025" to "00:00 19 April 2023 to 23:59 on 19 October 2025".

The consultation will run for 6 weeks and the Government will publish their response later this year.

The Home Office is launching a separate consultation on PACE codes of practice following Royal Assent of the National Security Act 2023 (NSA). That consultation also included amendments to PACE code A. It includes updates to govern the use of search powers created within the state threats prevention and investigation measures (STPIMs) regime, and an update to protect the identities of police officers involved in investigating offences under the NSA.

[HCWS986]

JUSTICE

Domestic Homicide Sentencing Review by Clare Wade KC: Government Response

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): I am pleased to publish today the Government's full response to the recommendations made by Clare Wade KC in the independent Domestic Homicide Sentencing Review. This builds on the interim response that was made alongside publication of the review in March this year and involves important legislative changes to the sentencing framework in England and Wales.

Murder is the most serious crime a person can commit, and we must ensure that in every case the sentence is commensurate with the severity of the crime. Everyone

should feel safe in their own home and our sentencing framework must reflect the seriousness of violence and abuse which is committed by those closest to them.

Around a quarter of all homicides in England and Wales are classed as domestic; that is, they are committed by the partner, ex-partner or relative of the victim. Over the last 10 years, this represents an average of nearly 160 homicides per year, with almost 90 of these being committed by a partner or ex-partner.

In 2021, Clare Wade KC was commissioned to review sentencing in domestic homicide cases to establish whether current law and sentencing guidelines are fit for purpose and to identify options for reform. This followed concerns raised by a number of stakeholders including the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Victims Commissioner, and also by the parents of two young women, Poppy Devey Waterhouse and Ellie Gould, who were tragically murdered by their ex-boyfriends in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

The majority of domestic homicides are committed by men against women. Indeed, over 90% of the murder cases in our Initial Case Review were committed by men against their female partner or ex-partner. The review has found that in many of these cases the victim has been subjected to years of abuse before their death. The review has also found that many domestic homicides committed by men against women involve the use of excessive and gratuitous violence, referred to as “overkill”, and that these cases often take place at the end of a relationship, when the perpetrator perceives that they can no longer control the victim and effectively decides, “If I can’t have you then nobody can.” Where female perpetrators commit domestic homicide, it is often, though not exclusively, the case that they have been the victims of abuse and have killed their abuser.

The legislation that sets out our sentencing framework for murder is contained in schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020. It was first introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 some 20 years ago and, although aggravating and mitigating factors can be applied at the discretion of judges, it does not include any specific consideration of the seriousness of domestic homicides and the abuse that often precedes these cases.

Over the last 20 years, our societal and legal understanding of domestic abuse has evolved. This Government created the criminal offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in the Serious Crime Act 2015, and introduced the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which introduced a legal definition of domestic abuse for the first time, and the new criminal offence of non-fatal strangulation. We are also delivering on our rape review action plan, the tackling violence against women and girls strategy and the tackling domestic abuse strategy, and more than quadrupling funding for victim and witness support services by 2024-25, up from £41 million in 2009-10. Together, these transformative cross-Government programmes work to prevent abuse, support victims and pursue perpetrators, as well as to strengthen the system’s response to violence against women and girls.

The review has found that our sentencing framework for homicide does not yet fully reflect this increased seriousness that society now recognises in domestic cases, and that it does not adequately account for the extent of culpability arising from whether a perpetrator of homicide was also a perpetrator or victim of abuse before the killing.

This will change. Our response to the recommendations made in the review will mean that for the first time, the seriousness of domestic murders and the particular harms that arise in these cases will be recognised in our sentencing framework. The perpetrators in these cases must, and will, serve sentences that truly reflect the severity of these crimes.

We will introduce legislation to give domestic murders specialist consideration in the sentencing framework

Cases of domestic murder are rarely isolated incidents. They are often the culmination of years of abuse and in the majority of cases this abuse has been committed by the perpetrator of the murder, usually a man, against the victim, usually a woman. As announced in the interim response, for cases where an abusive partner or family member has killed their victim, the seriousness of the preceding controlling or coercive behaviour will now be recognised in statute as a statutory aggravating factor to murder. Practically, this will mean that judges must consider increasing the minimum custodial term for perpetrators who have exhibited this behaviour.

A minority of domestic murders, however, involve a victim of abuse who has snapped and killed their abuser. In most of these cases, the perpetrator of the killing and the victim of the abuse is a woman. The review recommends that, though murder is always wrong, a history of coercive or controlling behaviour by the victim of a murder against the perpetrator should be added to the statutory mitigating factors for murder. This means that a judge must consider decreasing a perpetrator’s minimum custodial term where they have been a victim of this behaviour.

I can announce today that we will introduce legislation to make this change as soon as possible, along with the statutory aggravating factor. This will ensure that the experience of abuse which precedes a murder and the impact this has on the perpetrator’s culpability will now be recognised in statute.

In addition to a history of controlling or coercive behaviour, the review identified other harms which are particularly prevalent in domestic murders and recommended that the seriousness of these should be recognised in statute. As announced in the interim response, “overkill” will be made a statutory aggravating factor to murder, recognising the intense distress this causes the families of victims, knowing that the body of their loved one was violated in such a way.

I can announce today that we will also be accepting the recommendation in the review to introduce another statutory aggravating factor to murder for cases where the killing takes place at the end of a relationship, or when the victim has expressed a desire to leave the relationship. Killing in this context is the final controlling act of an abusive partner, and the seriousness of this will now be recognised in statute, leading to increased sentences for these perpetrators.

We will propose that the Sentencing Council update its guidelines in light of both the review and the Government’s response to its recommendations.

The review makes a number of recommendations which relate to the offence of manslaughter and the sentencing guidelines. These recommendations fall under the remit of the independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales rather than the Government.

Today, I have written to the chair of the Sentencing Council to propose that sentencing guidelines are revised in light of the review and the Government response to its recommendations. The council has a statutory obligation to consider this request and has already resolved to set up a working group to consider the review and response in the round.

We will commission a review of the use of defences to murder in cases involving domestic abuse

We asked Clare Wade KC to consider the use of defences to murder by domestic abuse victims who kill their abuser. She was unable to conduct a full or detailed review of this, due to insufficient resource, resulting in her recommendation that a full and comprehensive review of the defences to murder be carried out.

The Government partially accept this recommendation as we believe that the use of, or obstacles to the use of, defences to murder in domestic abuse cases should be examined. However, we do not consider it necessary to extend a review to all possible defences to murder, as this would need to consider defences which have no real bearing on domestic homicide, which would add to the complexity and length of any review. The Government will be inviting the Law Commission to undertake this review.

Training and data

As well as these important changes to our sentencing framework, the review recognises the important role that improvements in training and the collection of data have in responding to domestic homicides.

In June, the Home Office launched the beta version of its new central library for all domestic homicide reviews. This will enable far greater analysis of patterns, trends and risk factors for domestic homicide and ensure that this data is accessible to the public. Ultimately, this will help to improve society's understanding of the triggers and causes of domestic homicide and the ways that these horrible crimes can be prevented.

In terms of training, in April the Crown Prosecution Service published updated prosecution guidance on stalking and for cases involving controlling or coercive behaviour. It is also continuing to develop and roll out additional training on domestic abuse, controlling or coercive behaviour, stalking and the impact of trauma on victims, ensuring that this reflects our most up to date understanding of this behaviour.

We will launch a public consultation on further reform

In the interim announcement in March, the Government committed that in addition to responding to the review's recommendations, we would seek views via a public consultation on whether there should be a starting point of 25 years for cases of murder where the perpetrator has controlled or coerced the victim before killing them. This was to ensure that all options for reform have been considered. It is for the same reason that I am announcing today that this consultation will be expanded to explore the sentencing starting point for murders committed with a knife or other weapon which was already at the scene. This is in recognition of concerns that have been raised regarding the difference between the 25-year starting point for murders involving the use of a weapon which has been taken to the scene with intent, and the baseline starting point of 15 years for murder which would apply if a knife or other weapon used was already at the scene. Of course, this is particularly

relevant to domestic homicides given weapons are often picked up at the scene, for example a knife that the perpetrator knew would be in the kitchen, meaning that they did not have to plan to bring a weapon with them.

I am very grateful to Clare Wade KC for her work on this review. I would also like to pay tribute to Carole Gould and Julie Devey, whom I met recently and whose tireless campaigning after the tragic murder of their daughters, Ellie Gould and Poppy Devey Waterhouse, was instrumental in bringing about this review.

[HCWS980]

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

State Opening of Parliament

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): I can confirm that the state opening of Parliament will take place on 7 November 2023.

As is usual, the current Session of Parliament will be prorogued ahead of the King's Speech and this time will be used to enable logistical and security preparations for the state opening of Parliament. The likely date of prorogation will be confirmed in due course.

[HCWS982]

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Departmental Update

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): This statement updates the House on progress that has been made across the Department's remit.

Update on the Intervention in the London Borough of Croydon

On 16 March 2023, the Minister for Local Government updated the House on the work of commissioners and improvement panels at three councils, including the London Borough of Croydon. Whilst acknowledging the significant steps that had already been taken by the council over recent months, given the depth of the historical challenges and the extent of improvement required, we were minded to move the existing improvement and assurance panel, chaired by Tony McArdle OBE, to a statutory footing.

This proposal followed the evidence provided in the improvement and assurance panel's latest assessment that the council under the leadership of Mayor Perry has made good progress in laying the foundations for its recovery. At the same time, historic issues continue to be unearthed at Croydon and their potential impact on the council and the progress made to date cannot be underestimated, particularly given its continuing precarious financial position. I concluded that the authority was not meeting its best value duty—a requirement set out in the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The intervention package proposed in March centred on the council continuing to make the necessary improvements to the satisfaction of the improvement and assurance panel, as it has done to date. The panel would be backed by statutory directions issued to the

council requiring it to follow the instructions of the panel if they were not satisfied in the future with the progress being made.

I invited representations on our proposals from the council, and from members of the public, which I have now received and considered.

We received one representation from the chief executive of the council. The council supported the intervention and the proposal to move the existing improvement and assurance panel to a statutory footing, although requested some changes to the proposed intervention package to remove risk management and commercial governance as individual priority areas, citing notable progress in these areas. The representation also identified finance, housing and transformation as three pressing priorities which the council needs to address and which should be specifically covered by the proposed intervention package. It recognises the importance of the council continuing to lead its recovery and is committed to continue working positively with the panel moving forward.

Having carefully considered the representations received about the intervention, I am today confirming that the panel will now be placed on a statutory footing.

Best Value Intervention in the London Borough of Croydon

On balance, it is not necessary to identify risk management and commercial governance as individual priority areas at this stage and we have amended the intervention package accordingly. We expect the panel to continue to monitor the effectiveness of the council's management arrangements.

The intervention package should focus on the three individual priority areas of finance, housing and transformation and we have amended the package to reflect this. On this basis, we have decided to make two new appointments to the improvement and assurance panel. Margaret Lee, Finance Lead, wrote to me on 12 March to tender her resignation for personal reasons. I accepted Ms Lee's resignation with immediate effect and I would like to thank her for her excellent work in Croydon and wish her well for the future. Along with appointment of a new Finance Lead, we are also appointing a new panel member to lead on housing.

Brian Roberts OBE (Finance Lead) - Brian provided financial support to the commissioner team in Liverpool and was Finance Commissioner at Northamptonshire County Council. Brian is currently Chair of the CIPFA Financial Management and Governance Panel.

Pamela Leonce (Housing Lead) - Pamela is the CEO Founder at Stowhill Careers and has been an Executive Director with experience across the housing, health, social care and criminal justice sector.

This brings the panel membership to five, with Tony McArdle continuing to chair the panel and Jon Wilson and Phil Brookes continuing in their respective roles as leads in adult social care, and commercial and asset disposal. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tony, Jon and Phil for their ongoing work in driving forward the necessary improvements at Croydon and for agreeing to continue leading the Croydon improvement and assurance panel. We will appoint a new panel member for transformation in due course.

The statutory panel has been appointed until 20 July 2025, or until such earlier or later time as we determine. We are clear that the directions should operate for as long, and only as long, and only in the form, as necessary.

The panel will be asked to provide their next report within the next three months, with their initial views and an assessment of whether they require further support. I will review panel membership at this point to ensure that the panel continues to be fit for purpose for the council. Future reports will be provided every six months, or as agreed with the panel.

I want to be clear that the council will continue to lead its recovery but that the intervention package and appointment of the two new panel members will ensure momentum is both maintained and increased with the support and expertise of the panel. That is to say that decisions will continue to be made by the council; the intention being that the panel will only use their powers of instruction as a last resort if they are dissatisfied with the council's improvement processes.

As with other interventions led by my Department, the council will be directed to meet the costs of the improvement and assurance panel. The fees paid to individuals are published in appointment letters which are available separately on gov.uk. I am assured this provides value for money given the expertise that is being brought, and the scale of the challenge in councils requiring statutory intervention.

Conclusion

The Government will continue to work closely with the political, business and cultural leadership of Croydon, to ensure the return of the council to sustainability for the long term. We wish to place on record again our thanks for the progress made to date and look forward to further advancement in the months ahead.

I have published the directions and explanatory memorandum associated with this announcement on gov.uk and will deposit copies in the Library of the House.

Election finance regulation

In December 2020, the Government uprated election spending limits for candidates at local government elections in England in line with historic inflation since 2014 (3 December 2020, Official Report, HCWS618). At that time, the Minister for the Constitution and Devolution, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), announced the Government intention to review party and candidate spending limits for all other reserved polls with a view to uprating them in line with inflation since they were last set.

In September 2022, the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), wrote to the members of the Parliamentary Parties Panel in September 2022 to consult them on uprating spending limits and other sums in electoral legislation. This letter was also published on gov.uk.

The Government now intend to proceed with uprating reserved and excepted party and candidate spending limits to reflect changes in the value of money in the years since the respective limits were set. This is an important action as many of the absolute statutory spending limits have not been uprated since they were set over 20 years ago. Limits for UK parliamentary candidates were last uprated by the coalition Government seven years ago, in 2014. The lack of change in absolute terms impacts campaigning ability, given the increased costs of printing, postage and communication, which is vital for parties and candidates to engage with voters. There will be no change in real terms.

The Government also have a statutory duty under section 155 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to review specified sums in that Act, broadly relating to the reporting of donations and regulated transactions, and either uprate those sums to reflect changes in the value of money or where I, as Secretary of State, decide not to amend any of the specified sums make a statement to Parliament explaining why.

It has been more than a decade since these thresholds were last uprated by the last Labour Government in 2009, following their introduction in 2000. If these limits are not uprated the effect is to cut the thresholds in real terms. The principle of a threshold for publishing donations was established following the report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Neill Committee) on the funding of political parties in 1998 (Cm 4057), noting the need to balance privacy and transparency; the Labour Government's response in 1999 (Cm 4413) agreed with this principle.

Therefore, the Government intend to uprate in line with inflation some of these thresholds for political parties, regulated donees, permitted participants at referendums and for unincorporated associations making political contributions, where they relate to the reporting of larger donations. The purpose of these reporting thresholds is to provide transparency around the granting of larger donations, balanced with the administrative burden such reporting may create for the recipient and with the privacy of smaller donors. Uprating these thresholds will ensure that balance is maintained in line with the original policy and legislative intent of Parliament when setting the thresholds. Again, there is no change in real terms.

However, the Government have decided not to uprate some of the specified sums. It is not the Government's intention to uprate the sums specified in section 95(B)(6) and schedule 11, which relate to third-party campaigners. Given that some of these thresholds are within devolved competence, this is to avoid divergence of these thresholds and thereby risk undue complexity for campaigners. The Government will also not increase the £500 threshold replicated across the 2000 Act relating to the point at which a financial contribution is considered a regulated donation, and subject to permissibility checks. The Government do not consider this threshold to be inadequate. This approach will ensure that all checks on the permissibility of donations and donors remain as they do now, and reflects the stance the Government have taken to prevent foreign interference in elections.

None of these reforms costs taxpayers' money. Indeed, in Britain, taxpayers do not have to bankroll political parties' campaigning. Political parties have to raise money themselves, while following transparency and compliance rules laid out in law. Those who oppose party fundraising need to explain how many millions they want taxpayers to pay for state funding instead.

Finally, violence and intimidation cannot be tolerated and should have absolutely no place in our public life. The Elections Act 2022 provides for new measures to tackle intimidation in elections, building on the wider work to address intimidation in public life, as outlined in the written statement of 9 March 2021, Official Report, HCWS833.

No one should feel afraid to participate in our democracy. To provide clarity on the issue of whether security expenses fall to be regulated under electoral law, the

Government intend to explicitly exempt reasonable security expenses from contributing to spending limits for political parties and candidates at reserved and excepted UK elections, to ensure that these limits are not a barrier to providing adequate security during election campaigns. Many parties and agents already take the view that money spent on the security of a candidate is clearly not money spent promoting such a candidate to the electorate; however, the Government believe there are merits in explicitly stating this in law to provide greater clarity.

The Government will further engage with the Parliamentary Parties Panel and the Electoral Commission on the technical implementation of these measures.

Taken together, the measures will support continued democratic engagement by political parties and candidates; facilitate continued freedom of political expression and association, whilst ensuring our elections remain free and fair.

Update on Government Action in Relation to Onshore Wind

The Government recognise the importance of taking into account the views of local communities in the appropriate siting of onshore windfarms, which is why the Conservative Government in 2016 bolstered the protections that existed in the planning system, helping to protect treasured landscapes and in particular national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and the green belt. And following action taken by the Conservative Government in 2016, applications for onshore wind are rightly decided at a local level. These planning changes were introduced by a Conservative majority Government. During the coalition Government, the Liberal Democrats blocked the proposals to give local people a greater say.

But the Government are conscious that there is a lack of clarity as to how to meet the test for community backing if there are objections, even where the rest of the community is supportive, and some projects are stalled as a result. The proposed site must also currently be designated in a development plan.

The Government are determined to address these issues, and therefore recently conducted a consultation on proposed changes to the national planning policy framework, including measures for onshore wind. The proposals aim to address local planning bottlenecks and would provide local authorities with greater flexibility when considering new onshore wind planning applications with local support. They included consulting on an approach where onshore wind is still decided at a local level and permission is predicated on demonstrating local support and satisfactorily addressing planning impacts identified by the local community. We also consulted on local authorities having more flexibility to demonstrate their support for areas suitable for onshore wind by allowing more routes to do this than just the local development plan.

The consultation period was open until 2 March 2023, during which we sought the views and opinions of stakeholders, experts, and the public. The responses we received demonstrated strong support for taking steps to enable more developments to proceed, and I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all those who participated in this vital process. I recognise the importance of these views and will set out our formal response to the consultation when we publish it in the autumn.

In the British energy security strategy, the Government also committed to develop local partnerships for onshore wind in England, enabling supportive communities who wish to host new onshore wind infrastructure to directly benefit from doing so.

Government are already doing work in this space and have recently published a consultation focused on how the current system of engagement between communities and developers for onshore wind, and the types of community benefit packages that are offered, can be improved. The consultation closed on 7 July. Government are now analysing the responses received and the response will be published in due course. Where there is demonstrable local support, onshore wind in the right places has the potential to create green jobs and foster economic growth in communities.

[HCWS985]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Consultation on Powers in Relation to UK-related Domain Name Registries

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Paul Scully): The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) will be commencing sections 19-21 of the Digital Economy Act 2010 (DEA 2010).

This legislation sets out the DSIT Secretary of State's powers of intervention in the event when any UK-related domain name registry fails to address serious, relevant abuses of their domain names, posing significant risk to the UK electronic communications networks and its users.

It is important we undertake this work to ensure that the UK will continue to meet international best practice on governance of country code top-level domains in line with our key global trading partners and our future global trading commitments.

The UK's internet registries work hard to tackle abuses of their domain names. These powers will provide additional certainty for UK users that appropriate procedures will continue to be in place to help address abuse of UK-related domain names.

DSIT will be setting out in secondary legislation a list of misuses and unfair uses of domain names that registries in scope must take action to mitigate and deal with, and also cover the registry's arrangements for dealing with complaints in connection with the domain names in scope.

In order to understand the wide landscape of stakeholder views on UK-related domain names, a full public consultation has been published today and will run for six weeks.

A copy of this consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on gov.uk.

[HCWS984]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Public Consultation on Occupational Health

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mel Stride): Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, later today, I will publish a Command Paper launching the public consultation entitled "Occupational Health: Working Better."

Tackling economic inactivity due to long-term sickness is a top priority for the Government. Increasing labour force participation supports the Prime Minister's priorities of halving inflation and growing the economy. The Chancellor announced £2 billion at the spring Budget 2023 to support disabled people and people with health conditions to work. This consultation, together with the HM Treasury-led consultation to assess the case for further support through the tax system, represents a significant opportunity to work in partnership with employers to increase the coverage of occupational health provision.

Expert-led impartial advice, and interventions such as OH, can help employers provide appropriate and timely work-based support to manage their employees' health conditions. However, OH coverage across Great Britain is currently at 45% of workers, which is substantially lower than international comparators.

This consultation brings together employers, the healthcare sector, and local communities by seeking their views on ways to increase OH coverage, specifically by exploring:

Voluntary standards and best-practice sharing, to help provide a simple and clear baseline for quality OH provision for all employers, particularly Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Best practice from other countries and other UK-based employer models that enable employers to provide support for their employees.

How we develop and support a multidisciplinary workforce in work and health, including expert OH workforce. This will build on our existing work with the OH sector and explore the opportunities this can offer businesses and providers.

Together, these consultations will inform potential policy options to support the success and prosperity of businesses, particularly SMEs and OH providers, to support individuals to remain and thrive in work, contributing to reducing labour market inactivity in the UK.

I invite employers, particularly SMEs, OH providers, healthcare professionals and non-healthcare professionals to respond to the consultation and share their views. A large print and Welsh version of the consultation are available. Further, a British Sign Language version will be made available.

[HCWS989]

Petition

Thursday 20 July 2023

OBSERVATIONS

TRANSPORT

Laughton Common Footpath and Speed Reduction Scheme

The petition of residents of the constituency of Rother Valley,

Declares that road safety and traffic calming measures must be installed on Laughton Common Road; notes that the safety of the bridge on this road must be assessed and strengthened; further declares that a safe footpath between Laughton Common and Thurcroft must be installed following the loss of life on Laughton Common Road in the last few weeks.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons call on the Government to urge Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council to install speed monitoring devices on this road and provide a footpath between Laughton Common and Thurcroft.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Alexander Stafford, Official Report, 6 July 2023; Vol. 735, c. 1025.]*

[P002842]

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Richard Holden):

The setting of local speed limits is a matter for the local traffic authority, which has powers to make enforceable

speed limit orders that may set either variable speed limits that apply only at certain times, or permanent speed limits that operate all the time.

The Department issues guidance to local traffic authorities designed to make sure that speed limits are appropriately and consistently set while allowing for flexibility to deal with local circumstances. The guidance can be found online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-local-speed-limits>.

This guidance is not mandatory and the final decision is for the authority, working with the police force that would carry out any enforcement.

Local authorities are free to make their own decisions about the streets under their care, provided they take account of the relevant legislation. This includes provision of traffic management measures such as traffic calming. They are also responsible for day-to-day management of their road networks, including any necessary road and street works.

The Highways Act 1980 places a duty under section 66 on each local highway authority to

“provide in or by the side of a highway maintainable at the public expense by them which consists of or comprises a made-up carriageway, a proper and sufficient footway as part of the highway in any case where they consider the provision of a footway as necessary or desirable for the safety or accommodation of pedestrians; and they may light any footway provided by them under this subsection.”

It would be inappropriate for the Government to seek to intervene in the process of local democratic accountability.

Ministerial Corrections

Thursday 20 July 2023

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill

The following is an extract from the 11th sitting of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Public Bill Committee on 29 June 2023.

Kevin Hollinrake: Of course, as part of my role, or my successor's role if I move from this position back to the Back Benches or wherever, we regularly have meetings with the CMA to discuss its activities and where it is using its powers. Indeed, we write **an annual** letter to the CMA, which sets out where we expect its focus to lie.

[Official Report, Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Public Bill Committee, 29 June 2023, Vol. 735, c. 283.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake).

An error has been identified in my contribution. The correct information should have been:

Kevin Hollinrake: Of course, as part of my role, or my successor's role if I move from this position back to the Back Benches or wherever, we regularly have meetings with the CMA to discuss its activities and where it is using its powers. Indeed, we write a letter to the CMA, which sets out where we expect its focus to lie, **and update this when required.**

The following is an extract from the 13th sitting of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Public Bill Committee on 4 July 2023.

Kevin Hollinrake: The provisions apply specifically to traders to consumers, not traders to businesses. On how we determine the exemptions, **such as for magazines, delivery services, gyms, software and so on**, a range of stakeholders, including regulators, businesses and consumer groups, developed the list and the scope of sectors that are exempt from the subscription measures.

[Official Report, Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Public Bill Committee, 4 July 2023, Vol. 735, c. 344.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake).

An error has been identified in my contribution. The correct information should have been:

Kevin Hollinrake: The provisions apply specifically to traders to consumers, not traders to businesses. On how we determine the exemptions, a range of stakeholders, including regulators, businesses and consumer groups, developed the list and the scope of sectors that are exempt from the subscription measures.

The following is an extract from the 14th sitting of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Public Bill Committee on 11 July 2023.

Kevin Hollinrake: The CEO and chair of the CMA regularly appear before the relevant Select Committee—five times as the hon. Member said. Most recently, they appeared before the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee. Indeed, they meet me on a regular basis, and we also provide **an annual** strategic steer.

[Official Report, Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Public Bill Committee, 11 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 406.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake).

An error has been identified in my contribution. The correct information should have been:

Kevin Hollinrake: The CEO and chair of the CMA regularly appear before the relevant Select Committee—five times as the hon. Member said. Most recently, they appeared before the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee. Indeed, they meet me on a regular basis, and we also provide a strategic steer.

EDUCATION

Draft Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Industry Training Board) Order 2023

The following is an extract from the Fifth Delegated Legislation Committee on the draft Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Industry Training Board) Order 2023 on 12 July 2023.

Robert Halfon: He talked about the budget, but he will know that 99.6% of the apprenticeship budget, which **includes the levy that** is set by the Treasury, was **used over the past year.**

[Official Report, Fifth Delegated Legislation Committee, 12 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 7.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon).

An error has been identified in my contribution. The correct information should have been:

Robert Halfon: He talked about the budget, but he will know that 99.6% of the apprenticeship budget, which is set by the Treasury, was **spent in the 2021-22 financial year.**

Skills and Apprenticeships: Funding

The following are extracts from Education questions on 17 July 2023.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): New research from the House of Commons Library has shown that the amount of the apprenticeship levy paid by employers that has been allocated to the apprenticeship budget has fallen from 89% in 2017 to just 77% in the most recent year. The truthful answer to the question from the hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) is that the Secretary of State is doing nothing to reform the apprenticeship levy, as she believes it is working perfectly. Can the Minister confirm that any employer that, like the hon. Member for Stroud, wants greater flexibility in the levy should vote Labour in the next general election?

Gillian Keegan: There is nothing that would make me give such drastic advice. The truth about the apprenticeship levy is that 99.6% of it will be spent this year. We can look in the rear view mirror, and there are some reports going back over time that show some underspend in the levy, but they are back over time. We are now spending 99.6% of the levy. Perhaps what the hon. Gentleman has not appreciated is that some of the funding goes to the devolved Governments.

[Official Report, 17 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 602.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Education:

An error has been identified in the response given to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins).

The correct response should have been:

Gillian Keegan: There is nothing that would make me give such drastic advice. The truth about the apprenticeship **budget** is that 99.6% of it **was spent in the 2021-22 financial year**. We can look in the rear view mirror, and there are some reports going back over time that show some underspend in the levy, but they are back over time. We **have spent** 99.6% of the **budget**. Perhaps what the hon. Gentleman has not appreciated is that some of the funding goes to the devolved **Administrations**.

Reading Standards: Primary-age Children

13. **Sally-Ann Hart** (Hastings and Rye) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to improve standards of reading of primary age children. [906009]

The Minister for Schools (Nick Gibb): The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study was published in May this year. England had come fourth among 43 countries that tested children of the same age, nine and 10-year-olds. In 2012 we introduced the phonics screening check, testing six-year-olds for their progress in reading and phonics.

[Official Report, 17 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 608.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Schools:

An error has been identified in the response given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart).

The correct response should have been:

Nick Gibb: The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study was published in May this year. England had come fourth among 43 countries that tested children of the same age, nine and 10-year-olds. In 2012 we introduced the phonics screening check, testing **year 1 pupils** for their progress in reading and phonics.

Topical Questions

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): The chairs of the governing bodies of 19 primary and secondary schools across the London Boroughs of Richmond and Kingston upon Thames have today written to the Education Secretary, requesting an urgent meeting to discuss the crippling funding and recruitment challenges they face. Will she agree to meet them?

Nick Gibb: Of course the Secretary of State will agree, as she has just said to me. We are spending record amounts of funding on schools. The Secretary of State

achieved an extra £2 billion in the autumn statement last year and we are now spending £59.6 billion on school funding.

[Official Report, 17 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 620.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Schools:

An error has been identified in the response given to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson).

The correct response should have been:

Nick Gibb: Of course the Secretary of State will agree, as she has just said to me. We are spending record amounts of funding on schools. The Secretary of State achieved an extra £2 billion in the autumn statement last year and **by 2024-25, we will be spending** £59.6 billion on school funding.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Cancer Waiting Times and Outcomes

The following is an extract from Health and Social Care questions on 6 June 2023.

Kate Hollern: In May last year I wrote to the then Health Secretary and the Prime Minister about the case of a young man in my constituency, Elliott Simpson, who was misdiagnosed with a water wart in a telephone consultation with a GP. When Elliott was finally able to see someone face-to-face, he found that he had late-stage skin cancer. He passed away on 28 April, aged just 27.

Between January and March this year, both the two-week wait target and the 62-day target were missed at East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust. Does the Secretary of State accept that delays are costing lives?

Steve Barclay: The whole House will be hugely saddened to learn of the passing of Elliott, especially at such a tender age.

The hon. Lady is right to highlight the importance of speedy diagnosis, and I was pleased that we met the faster diagnosis standard in February for the first time and again in March, with three in four patients receiving their diagnosis within two weeks and nine in 10 starting treatment within a month. She is also right to point out that there is still variation between trusts, and we are focusing on that in particular, but it is good that nationally we are hitting the faster diagnosis standard.

[Official Report, 6 June 2023, Vol. 733, c. 664.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay):

Errors have been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Kate Hollern).

The correct information should have been:

Steve Barclay: The whole House will be hugely saddened to learn of the passing of Elliott, especially at such a tender age.

The hon. Lady is right to highlight the importance of speedy diagnosis, and I was pleased that we met the faster diagnosis standard **in February for the first time**, with three in four patients receiving their diagnosis within **28 days** and nine in 10 starting treatment within

a month, **and virtually met it in March**. She is also right to point out that there is still variation between trusts, and we are focusing on that in particular, but it is good that nationally we are hitting the faster diagnosis standard.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Construction Workers: Pension Age

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on Construction Workers: Pension Age on 12 July 2023.

Guy Opperman: Having worked in the Department for Work and Pensions for the past eight years, for my sins, I can strongly assure the hon. Member for Midlothian that the administration of the state pension is a marvel, but it is also incredibly complex. The moment that there were an introduction of a differential assessment, it would create a logistical conundrum, to say the least, and would require administration on an epic level. Getting such a thing correct—I suspect that as the hon. Gentleman proposes, all these things would have to be assessed, including with a prior medical assessment—is extraordinarily difficult. With respect, that approach was comprehensively rejected by the Cridland report. I accept that one paragraph of the Neville-Rolfe report seems to suggest that certain people do so; I think it talks about people who are w65 with 45 years of national insurance contributions. It is something that can be

legislated for, because this Government or any future Government will have **to legislate for** the state pension situation in the next two years.

[Official Report, 12 July 2023, Vol. 736, c. 156WH.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Employment, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman).

An error has been identified in my response to the debate. The correct response should have been:

Guy Opperman: Having worked in the Department for Work and Pensions for the past eight years, for my sins, I can strongly assure the hon. Member for Midlothian that the administration of the state pension is a marvel, but it is also incredibly complex. The moment that there were an introduction of a differential assessment, it would create a logistical conundrum, to say the least, and would require administration on an epic level. Getting such a thing correct—I suspect that as the hon. Gentleman proposes, all these things would have to be assessed, including with a prior medical assessment—is extraordinarily difficult. With respect, that approach was comprehensively rejected by the Cridland report. I accept that one paragraph of the Neville-Rolfe report seems to suggest that certain people do so; I think it talks about people who are 65 with 45 years of national insurance contributions. It is something that can be legislated for, because this Government or any future Government will have **to consider** the state pension situation in the next two years.

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