

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

## ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC BODIES (OVERSEAS MATTERS) BILL

*First Sitting*

*Tuesday 5 September 2023*

*(Morning)*

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### CONTENTS

Programme motion agreed to.  
Written evidence (Reporting to the House) motion agreed to.  
Motion to sit in private agreed to.  
Examination of witnesses.  
Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.

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**not later than**

**Saturday 9 September 2023**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chairs:* DAME CAROLINE DINENAGE, † SIR GEORGE HOWARTH

† Blackman, Bob ( <i>Harrow East</i> ) (Con)	Nici, Lia ( <i>Great Grimsby</i> ) (Con)
† Buchan, Felicity ( <i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities</i> )	† Norris, Alex ( <i>Nottingham North</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)
† Clarke-Smith, Brendan ( <i>Bassetlaw</i> ) (Con)	† Qaisar, Ms Anum ( <i>Airdrie and Shotts</i> ) (SNP)
† David, Wayne ( <i>Caerphilly</i> ) (Lab)	† Richards, Nicola ( <i>West Bromwich East</i> ) (Con)
† Evans, Dr Luke ( <i>Bosworth</i> ) (Con)	† Smith, Greg ( <i>Buckingham</i> ) (Con)
† Fletcher, Colleen ( <i>Coventry North East</i> ) (Lab)	† Stephens, Chris ( <i>Glasgow South West</i> ) (SNP)
† Holmes, Paul ( <i>Eastleigh</i> ) (Con)	† Young, Jacob ( <i>Redcar</i> ) (Con)
† Jenkinson, Mark ( <i>Workington</i> ) (Con)	Bradley Albrow, Huw Yardley, <i>Committee Clerks</i>
† Leadbeater, Kim ( <i>Batley and Spen</i> ) (Lab)	† <b>attended the Committee</b>
† McCabe, Steve ( <i>Birmingham, Selly Oak</i> ) (Lab)	

**Witnesses**

Jo Donnelly, Head of Pensions, Local Government Association

Jon Richards, Vice Chair, Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board

Russell Langer, Head of Policy and Research, Jewish Leadership Council

Daniel Sugarman, Director of Public Affairs, Board of Deputies of British Jews

Councillor Bob Deering, Executive Member, Resources & Performance, Hertfordshire County Council

Councillor James Jamieson, Former Chairman of the LGA

Hannah Weisfeld, Director, Yachad

James Gurd, Executive Director, Conservative Friends of Israel

## Public Bill Committee

Tuesday 5 September 2023

(Morning)

[SIR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

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

9.25 am

**The Chair:** Before we begin, I have a couple of preliminary announcements. *Hansard* colleagues would be grateful if Members could email their speaking notes to [hansardnotes@parliament.uk](mailto:hansardnotes@parliament.uk). Please switch electronic devices to silent. Tea and coffee are not allowed during sittings.

We will first consider the programme motion on the amendment paper. We will then consider a motion to enable the reporting of written evidence for publication, and a motion to allow us to deliberate in private about our questions before the oral evidence session. In view of the time available, I hope we can take those matters formally, without debate.

I call the Minister to move the programme motion standing in her name, which was discussed yesterday by the Programming Sub-Committee.

*Ordered,*

That—

(1) the Committee shall (in addition to its first meeting at 9.25 am on Tuesday 5 September) meet—

- (a) at 2.00 pm on Tuesday 5 September;
- (b) at 11.30 am on Thursday 7 September;
- (c) at 9.25 am and 2 pm on Tuesday 12 September;
- (d) at 11.30am and 2 pm on Thursday 14 September;

(2) the Committee shall hear oral evidence in accordance with the following Table:

TABLE

Date	Time	Witness
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 9.55 am	Local Government Association; Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 10.25 am	Jewish Leadership Council; Board of Deputies of British Jews
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 10.55 am	Councillor Bob Deering; Councillor James Jamieson
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 11.10 am	Yachad
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 11.25 am	Conservative Friends of Israel
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 2.30 pm	Henry Jackson Society; Free Speech Union

TABLE

Date	Time	Witness
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 2.45 pm	World Uyghur Congress
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 3.00 pm	Stephen Cragg KC
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 3.45 pm	Francis Hoar; Professor Andrew Tettenborn; Professor Adam Tomkins
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 4.00 pm	Balfour Project
Tuesday 5 September	Until no later than 4.30 pm	UNISON; Scottish Trades Union Congress
Thursday 7 September	Until no later than 12.00 pm	UK Lawyers for Israel; Steven Barrett
Thursday 7 September	Until no later than 12.30 pm	Human Rights Watch; Friends of the Earth; Amnesty International
Thursday 7 September	Until no later than 12.45 pm	Richard Hermer KC
Thursday 7 September	Until no later than 1.00 pm	Melanie Phillips

(3) proceedings on consideration of the Bill in Committee shall be taken in the following order: Clauses 1 to 3; the Schedule; Clauses 4 to 17; new Clauses; new Schedules; remaining proceedings on the Bill;

(4) the proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at 5.00 pm on Thursday 14 September.—(*Felicity Buchan.*)

*Resolved,*

That, subject to the discretion of the Chair, any written evidence received by the Committee shall be reported to the House for publication.—(*Felicity Buchan.*)

*Resolved,*

That, at this and any subsequent meeting at which oral evidence is to be heard, the Committee shall sit in private until the witnesses are admitted.—(*Felicity Buchan.*)

**The Chair:** Copies of written evidence that the Committee receives will be made available in the Committee Room and circulated to Members by email. We will now go into private session to discuss lines of questioning.

9.27 am

*The Committee deliberated in private.*

#### Examination of Witnesses

*Jo Donnelly and Jon Richards gave evidence.*

9.28 am

**The Chair:** We are now sitting in public again and the proceedings are being broadcast. Before we hear from the witnesses, do any Members wish to make a declaration of interest in connection with the Bill?

**Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con):** I have been to Israel on a trip paid for by the Conservative Friends of Israel, and I have a personal friendship with James Gurd, who will give evidence.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I declare my membership of Unison. I understand that an individual from Unison will give evidence at this session.

**Ms Anum Qaisar** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): As per my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, I recently visited the occupied territories. The visit was paid for by Amnesty, who will join us later this week.

**Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con): I have been on a Conservative Friends of Israel trip, and James Gurd is a personal friend of mine.

**Nicola Richards** (West Bromwich East) (Con): I have also been on a Conservative Friends of Israel trip, James Gurd is a friend of mine, and I used to work at the Jewish Leadership Council.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I am the parliamentary chair of Labour Friends of Israel. It is a non-pecuniary position, but I have also been to Israel with Labour Friends of Israel.

**Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): As per my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, I have been on a trip to Israel funded by Conservative Friends of Israel, and James Gurd is personally known to me.

**Mark Jenkinson** (Workington) (Con): As per my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, I have been on a trip to Israel funded by Conservative Friends of Israel, and James Gurd is personally known to me.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): I have been to Israel on a visit funded by Labour Friends of Israel, but that was many years ago.

**The Chair:** I suppose, for the sake of completeness, that I should say I too have been on a trip to Israel with Labour Friends of Israel. However, as with Wayne David, that was many years ago.

**Brendan Clarke-Smith** (Bassetlaw) (Con): I have also been on a trip funded by Conservative Friends of Israel, and I am also a friend of James Gurd.

**Kim Leadbeater** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I have been on a trip funded by Caabu, who are not giving evidence this morning, but I believe they are later on.

**The Chair:** Are there any more? I do not think there are any more Members!

We will first hear oral evidence from Jo Donnelly, who is the head of pensions at the Local Government Association, and Jon Richards, who is vice-chair of the Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board. Before calling the first Member to ask a question, I remind all Members that questions should be limited to matters within the scope of the Bill, and we must stick to the timings in the programme order the Committee has agreed. For this panel, we have until 9.55 am. To begin with, could the witnesses please introduce themselves for the record?

**Jo Donnelly:** I am Jo Donnelly, head of pensions at the Local Government Association.

**Jon Richards:** I am Jon Richards, vice-chair of the Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board. In my day job, I am assistant general secretary for Unison, the public services union, although I am here specifically in my role as vice-chair.

**The Chair:** I would like to call the first Member to ask a question—Minister.

**Q1 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan):** Thank you, Chair. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I would like to thank our witnesses for their time and expertise.

There have been instances where local government pension schemes have come under pressure from civil society groups to divest from a particular country or territory. Is that something you are aware of? What kind of pressure have you faced? Do you think that the Bill will allow pension schemes to focus on delivering value for their members, rather than being distracted by political campaigns?

**Jon Richards:** Perhaps I can start. Thank you very much for the question and for inviting us here. There have been limited incidents where there have been local attempts to push forward BDS at local levels. As a pension scheme, we are clear that this is a scheme about delivering pensions. Its fiduciary duty is on members to deliver what members want and expect. If, at any time, there are questions raised, we remind people of the fiduciary duty, which is the most important thing that drives matters.

Unfortunately, in recent years, we have seen a number of attempts by Governments and even suggestions by both the main parties that we should invest in various things—private equity and all the rest. That interferes with our duty to deliver pensions, and that is what drives us. So there have been a few small attempts, but they have not taken place. We have also seen some global investment managers making separate decisions, which our pension funds do not have any control over. Those are outwith our ability—we cannot do anything about it if they make those decisions, because it is a global investment association.

What we are fundamentally saying is that our primary duty is our fiduciary duty. Unfortunately, this Bill will interfere in that, and that is what our concern is. It has the potential to increase our administrative costs, as we have to monitor whatever we are asked to do, but also potential legal challenges, which we expect, because we know this is a very difficult minefield. So we have real concerns about the administrative governance and financial costs that this will put on us.

**Q2 Felicity Buchan:** But do you agree that it is not for pension funds to run your own foreign policy?

**Jon Richards:** Our primary aim is our fiduciary duty to deliver pensions, and you will hear us say that probably 10 more times throughout this session.

**Q3 Felicity Buchan:** Absolutely. Jo, do you want to come in on those questions?

**Jo Donnelly:** It is not a technical matter. My role here today is to assist you on the technical pension side of things.

**Q4 Felicity Buchan:** Great. Some may argue that the existing legislation is confusing and not comprehensive enough, as it does not deal with divestments—it deals with investment procurement decisions. In your opinion, does the Bill do enough to improve on existing legislation and prevent divestment campaigns?

**Jo Donnelly:** I think there are concerns around the clarity of a number of the provisions in the Bill and around how that will be dealt with in practice by pension committees, who are primarily making the decisions in the LGPS around investments and around strategy.

On the procurement side of things, I have taken some advice from my procurement colleagues in the LGA—obviously, I am not a procurement expert—and they have told me that, on the procurement side of things, there is nothing here that would cause any problems. The thing that is asked for is some more clarity around how the provisions on procurement in this Bill would interact with the Procurement Bill, which is currently going through Parliament as well. I think there is the potential for some confusion about how the provisions of each Bill interact with each other. So there is a request for some clarity and for clear communications to local authorities, and the LGA is happy to assist with that clarity on the procurement side of things.

**Q5 Felicity Buchan:** But you are happy that, given clear guidance on the harmony between the Procurement Bill and this Bill, this is very operable.

**Jo Donnelly:** On the procurement side, yes.

**Felicity Buchan:** Absolutely, yes.

**Jon Richards:** But not on the pension side. That is the difference: with procurement and pensions, this Bill will have a different impact on the ability in procurement, as opposed to the fiduciary duty, as I will say many times, versus pensions trustees.

**Felicity Buchan:** Clearly, this Bill is not—

**The Chair:** Before the Minister proceeds, could I just remind her that we have a fairly tight timetable? Perhaps she could take that into account in future questioning.

**Q6 Felicity Buchan:** Indeed. I just have one final question on the regulator. We have the Pensions Regulator in the Bill as the appropriate body for enforcing the ban, and they are clearly accustomed to similar roles. Do you think that that is the right regulator?

**Jo Donnelly:** There are not that many options in the pensions space for the LGPS. The Pensions Regulator already has a role in relation to the administration and governance of the LGPS, but it does not have a role in the investment side of the LGPS—it does with other, private sector pension schemes, but not the LGPS. So the provisions in the Bill would expand TPR's powers over some investment-type decisions in the LGPS. Our main concern around the regulator's role is that they ensure that they limit their oversight of investment

decisions to the provisions of the Bill and that they are properly resourced and trained to do that role, because it is quite different to what they are used to doing already.

**Felicity Buchan:** Thank you, Chair.

**Q7 Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you to our witnesses for their time. In opening, you were very clear, Jon Richards, about what your job is and what your job is not, and I think the Committee will have taken some comfort from that. Do you feel you need extra tools or controls do that job?

**Jon Richards:** I do not think we do. I think we think that the level of regulation of the LGPS is also already very high. You will have seen that the Government have just introduced a whole series of additional pension consultations, which we have to do—which poor Jo has to deal with and spend a long time on. Again, we think there is significant regulation. We have a regulator and we have a clear fiduciary duty. Trustees have clear responsibilities, including training responsibilities. They have a clear understanding of what should be done. There is a need for improving governance, and we have been doing a lot of work on that, including training. We have also tried to issue guidance on the need to be clear that, if there are challenges, or attempts to move people away from the fiduciary duty, we need to drag people back to that, and they should not be diverted by some of the political games that are potentially out there.

**Q8 Alex Norris:** You mentioned legal challenges. Could you say what your anxieties are there?

**Jon Richards:** There is some wording in some bits of the Bill. For instance, it talks about being substantially “influenced”, a “reasonable observer” and “moral disapproval”. There is a series of phrases. These are very open, vague phrases. It is a lawyers' charter. It really makes it difficult for us. We have already seen an increase in the number of legal challenges around this issue. You can see the pressures around a whole series of environmental issues. We face a whole series of pressures. Every new regulation, particularly if it is as openly worded as this, potentially makes it more difficult for us to deliver our fiduciary duty.

**Jo Donnelly:** Could I add something to that? The concerns about the judicial review and the court processes, in particular, are quite key for us, because it does appear that there could be dual running, effectively—enforcement action from the regulator alongside an interested party potentially bringing a judicial review or a High Court claim. The definition of an interested party is something that we would like to be clearer—for example, whether they need to be a scheme member or a local taxpayer. Some kind of clarity around the definition of who that could be would be helpful.

There is a real concern about the possibility of a local authority having to deal with a regulator investigation as well as a High Court claim. If a High Court claim was brought, that would be the first point of action. Normally, a High Court claim would be the end point; it would be the last resort. In this case, it could potentially be the first part of action, so the courts would be undertaking an investigation that we do not think would be helpful for them or the local authorities that are the subject of the action. That is a key concern for us as well.



**Jon Richards:** Can I add one thing, please, Chair? There is another issue about statements being made by particular people. If someone makes a statement, say, during a pensions committee meeting, and it is minuted, it is not clear whether the challenge is against the pensions committee, or the individual or whatever. There is some wording about the dangers of someone expressing themselves in a pensions committee meeting, and the potential impact of someone taking a challenge against the whole committee. Again, there is very loose and worrying wording for us.

**Q9 The Chair:** Before I bring in Chris Stephens, can I ask something? Of the various options for dealing with that problem that you mentioned, which do you think is likely to be the most effective?

**Jo Donnelly:** What we would like to see is a change in the Bill that would lead to the judicial review option or the High Court claim being possible only against the decision of the enforcement authority. Effectively, the decision that the regulator makes is what can be then challenged in court, rather than the decision—the alleged breach of the law—by the authority in the first place. Ideally, it would proceed as relatively normal, which is that a decision of an enforcement authority is what is challenged in law, rather than the original decision.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Chris Stephens.

**Q10 Chris Stephens:** Let me confirm my membership of Unison; that has been declared. I should also declare that I am a member of the Scottish local government pension scheme from my time working for Glasgow City Council.

Talking about green pensions, Lloyds Banking Group says:

“UK adults believe the biggest benefit of investing in a ‘green’ or ‘sustainable’ pension is the improvement that it would make to the lives of future generations...followed by the fact it could help save the planet”.

Are there any parallels between ethical investments in the environment and ethical investments in international human rights?

**Jon Richards:** It is a very tricky area. It is a difficult tightrope that we walk as pensions trustees and pensions administrators. Let us just say that there are no pensioners on a dead planet, so you can see a clear long-term approach to understanding how you need to deal with potential investments, knowing the potential issues. I should admit that many years ago, I trained as a geologist and I was somewhat sceptical of climate change. I see humanity as a very small part of the overall 4.5 billion years that the Earth has been going. I looked at the different overall increases in temperature, and I think it is now quite difficult to argue against the scientific evidence in that context. That is my view; I understand others have not, but I have changed my view over the years.

Clearly, there is a logic behind environmental and a wish on the part of members to do that. I go back to what we said before: we are there to deliver on behalf of the members. That is our fundamental requirement. Clearly, we can see a desire among the membership to do something about ESG, so there is an understanding and a need to deal with that, because it deals with the wider investment and member issue. This is not the

same type of political issue, and we wish to avoid, as much as possible as a pension scheme, getting tied into political issues. Unfortunately, this Bill does that to us.

**Q11 Chris Stephens:** Jon, you mentioned challenges that you have had. Are they coming from members of the scheme or people outwith the scheme? Can you maybe also talk about how members would raise a concern they had about an investment?

**Jon Richards:** Again, I do not want to get too dragged into this, because whenever you get involved in these, you always end up arguing about the extremes, as opposed to the thing. As I have said, there have been a very small number of attempts where this has happened. We are aware of one attempt where an external councillor sought to intervene. As I have said, there are some areas where investment managers have made decisions that have had an impact on the problem. Members have sought to do so, and some Unison branches and members have also made some attempts, but whenever they get through to the fiduciary duty, that is fundamentally where the decision is taken, and they have not been anywhere near meeting those requests at this time. They may do; people and members may change their minds. At the moment, we have not reached that threshold of decision making.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I have registered two other Members as signalling that they would like to ask questions. Have I missed anybody? No. In which case, I call Steve McCabe.

**Q12 Steve McCabe:** It has been suggested that there may be some confusion or a discrepancy between the schedule in the Bill that is designed to exclude pension schemes and clause 12, which deals specifically with the local government pension scheme. Do you regard that as a discrepancy, and what implications do you think it might have?

**Jo Donnelly:** I think it is just a feature of how the law has to be drafted in order to exclude all pension schemes except the local government pension scheme, because the law applies to bodies under section 6 of the Human Rights Act, which includes education institutions such as universities, and obviously there is a pension scheme associated with universities. The law needs to exclude those pension schemes but specifically include the LGPS. I just read this as the best way that the drafters have found to make that clear, so I do not see it as a problem; it is just that the way in which the drafting has to work is sometimes a little clunky.

**Q13 Steve McCabe:** Is it a legitimate course of action to treat pension schemes differently?

**Jon Richards:** This is one for me, isn't it? We would prefer it if the local government pension scheme was not subject to this Bill, as that interferes with our fiduciary duties.

**The Chair:** I think this will be the last question.

**Q14 Kim Leadbeater:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for joining us this morning. You have said that you are there to deliver on behalf of the members of your schemes. Many of my constituents will have pension funds and some may well have a view

on how those funds are invested, which is surely right. How will this legislation affect the ability of fund managers to respond to those concerns of members?

**Jo Donnelly:** It depends on the terminology. I would interpret “fund managers” as the asset managers: the investment professionals who manage the money in the pension scheme. They are tasked and given a mandate by the administering authority, by the pensions committee, which makes the decision as a collective. There is no individual decision making in the LGPS; it is all done as a collective by committee, which is one reason why there is some confusion for us about who the decision maker is, because that is never an individual in the LGPS.

In terms of fund managers as investment managers, they will continue to operate in line with the mandate that they are given by their client, which is the local authority or, in some cases, the investment pool, if it is one of the eight LGPS pools that exist in England and Wales. As long as those mandates do not breach the law, they will continue to operate as they do now. They make day-to-day commercial decisions about investments, taking into account all the relevant risk factors. If asset managers feel that there needs to be a change in an investment profile because of risk factors, they will make those decisions, normally without having to check that with the client—the authority that has invested the money.

**Jon Richards:** Can I just add that we have a series of oversight bodies that take those decisions? Obviously there is a pension fund committee in the council, which has the administrative authority. We also have separate pension boards which have half representatives of employers and half of employees, which again matches what we have at national level, where our board is six councillors and six member representatives. The chair is a Conservative councillor, the chair of the employers’ side is a Conservative councillor and I am a trade union official.

We have never had to vote at the national level. We have voting powers, but we have never used them because we have never needed to: we understand that we have a fiduciary duty. That is where we agree with Conservative councillors. We disagree very heavily on politics and all sorts of things, but when it comes to the committee we are pretty clear about what it is we need to do, and also about the need to improve governance to ensure that members’ representatives and members’ views are taken into account when people make those investment decisions.

**Q15 Kim Leadbeater:** You do not think this legislation will have a negative impact on that process?

**Jon Richards:** I do not think so. I think there are wider problems with this legislation. There are ways of dealing with governance and how members can feed in and put their views forward at local and national level. The Bill has a series of other difficulties that will cause us significant administrative, governance and legal problems.

**Jo Donnelly:** I think there are some concerns about the exceptions and how they work. In the schedule, there are exceptions to permit considerations around environmental, social and governance factors, which are obviously now standard practice to consider when looking at investments. But there are some concerns about the wording of those provisions, whether they will allow things to continue to operate, and whether committees will be able to consider specific concerns brought by scheme members.

**The Chair:** I am afraid we have reached the end of the time allotted to the Committee to ask questions. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the witnesses, who have been very clear and helpful in drawing our attention to some of the dilemmas and difficulties faced. I am sure when we come to deliberate on amendments and alterations to the Bill we will take very seriously the advice that has been given.

#### Examination of witnesses

*Russell Langer and Daniel Sugarman gave evidence.*

9.53 am

**The Chair:** We will now hear oral evidence from Russell Langer, head of policy and research at the Jewish Leadership Council, and Daniel Sugarman, director of public affairs for the Board of Deputies of British Jews. For this session, we have until 10.25 am. Would the witnesses please introduce themselves for the record?

**Russell Langer:** I am Russell Langer: I am the head of policy and research at the Jewish Leadership Council.

**Daniel Sugarman:** I am Daniel Sugarman: I am a director of public affairs at the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I will now bring in the first Member with a question.

**Q16 Wayne David:** Thank you, Chair, and good morning to you both. Your organisations support the legislation. I have read your submissions, and it is quite clear that you are supportive of the various aspects of it. But can you tell us, hand on heart: if you had a blank sheet of paper before you, would this be the approach that your organisations would be in favour of?

**Russell Langer:** I judge the legislation based on whether or not it adequately prohibits BDS in public bodies, and I believe it does; whether or not it covers the correct public bodies within its scope, and it does; and whether or not it has the appropriate enforcement powers to ensure that the Bill will have the intended effect, and it does. I did not draft the legislation—I saw the legislation at probably a similar time to you—but on those bases, it is something that I am very comfortable in supporting.

**Daniel Sugarman:** Similarly, we had no role in drafting the legislation, of course; we saw it at probably around the same time as many of you did. This is a policy area that we have been very interested in for quite a while now, and I think that the Bill as it stands addresses the concerns that we have, although of course if amendments are raised, we will watch them with interest, as will other people.

**Q17 Wayne David:** But let us say that there had been formal consultation with you before the publication of the draft legislation. Are there any specific points that you would have asked to be included in the legislation and which you do not find before you now?

**Russell Langer:** If we had amendments that we were proposing, we would have included them in our written submission, and I do not believe either organisation has. I look forward with interest to seeing amendments as they come forward, and we will consider them on their merits, but we are happy, as it stands, with the Bill.



**Q18 Wayne David:** Could I ask just one further question? I think that both organisations are in favour of a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. One thing in this legislation that is different from any other legislation that I have seen from this Government or any other British Government is that it equates the state of Israel with the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It has been suggested that that coupling, that equality of treatment, for the first time by a British Government, calls into question their commitment to a two-state solution. What is your view on that?

**Daniel Sugarman:** I think that we have to accept the circumstances as they currently are, and the circumstances currently are that there are hundreds of thousands of Jewish people living beyond what one might call the green line. There has been already a firm understanding among different parties to peace negotiations that there will have to be land swaps in terms of the future two-state solution that we hope and pray for. Given that that is the case, to penalise people who are living, essentially—there is a difference between hilltop settlements and towns, essentially, connected to Jerusalem where tens of thousands of people live. I think that the way things have worked up until now has led to everything being tarred with the same brush, and I am not sure that that is particularly helpful.

**Russell Langer:** If I can add this, I disagree with your assessment that the legislation paints it all in the same way. First, very clearly, Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan heights are listed separately in the Bill, and I am pretty sure that if you were to ask the Israeli Government, they would see that as them being listed separately. But more importantly, the UK Government have been clear that this does not change UK policy. UK policy on Israel and the settlements is something that is a reserved matter for the national Government and something that gets debated in this place on a regular basis. What we do not require is for that debate to happen in every public body around this country, especially when it is usually—it tends to be—the only foreign policy debate that happens in public bodies around the country. I think that is the really key—important—part here. To me, this is not a discussion about settlements. That is a legitimate conversation to happen in Parliament; we do not need to be having that conversation in every public body around this country.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Minister?

**Q19 Felicity Buchan:** Can you set out why you think that this legislation is necessary and also touch on the links between BDS campaigns and antisemitism?

**Russell Langer:** Sure. The boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign—BDS—against Israel is a pernicious campaign, which seeks to single out the world's only Jewish state for unique treatment. As I just said in the previous answer, when we look at the picture in public bodies around this country when it comes to foreign policy discussions, Israel is the only country that is singled out in this way. That was something that was made clear in the House of Commons Library briefing, prepared ahead of Second Reading, as well. I therefore believe that the legislation is necessary to end the practice of Israel being singled out in that way by public bodies around the country.

On the links to antisemitism, the link between antisemitism here in the UK and the situation in Israel is clear—it is clear in the statistics, in the months with the highest levels of antisemitism on record, which all correspond to the months in which conflicts have happened in Israel. That link is clear.

When the Jewish community is most vulnerable in this country and when antisemitism is at its highest, we tend to see public bodies under intense pressure from campaign groups to get involved by boycotting Israel. That comes back to the point that I made about it being the only time that they are usually asked to get involved in such foreign policy. The legislation will therefore allow public bodies such as local authorities, higher education institutions and cultural organisations to focus on improving community cohesion at a time when it is at its most threatened. The legislation is helpful to that.

**Daniel Sugarman:** If I might add to that, on the links to antisemitism, there are a few points to consider, the first of which is the somewhat questionable double standards. People who take an extreme interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and call for a full boycott of Israel seem rarely, if ever, to call for boycotts of any other country. It appears to be just the world's only Jewish state that gets that sort of treatment.

The history of boycotts against Jews is a painful one, linking directly back to Nazi Germany, and it is clear that at least for a significant percentage of the community, when we hear about boycotts against Israel, that is a link that is raised. We have also had cases, unfortunately, where people participating in BDS campaigns have gone beyond Israel. For example, in a supermarket, a bunch of BDS campaigners went in and started defacing products that they felt were Israeli-linked, but of course they went straight for the kosher food section, not appearing to distinguish. That sent a clear signal.

I will make two more quick points, if I may. First, polling suggests that more than 80% of British Jews see Israel as either central or important to their Jewish identity. There is a very strong link between the Jewish community and Israel. When Israel and Israel alone is targeted in such a manner, that really has a strong impact on the Jewish community.

The other thing to consider is that the co-founder of the BDS campaign has been very clear about what he sees as the end goal, which is not a two-state solution, but the destruction of Israel as a state and its replacement with a state in which Jews are a minority. Given that in the past 50 or 60 years we have seen exactly what has happened to every single other Jewish community in the Middle East that was a minority, I think that the Jewish community here and elsewhere is right to be profoundly concerned.

**Q20 Felicity Buchan:** I have one more question. Clause 4 prohibits a statement of intent to boycott. Do you agree that that is a necessary addition to the Bill? One further question on enforcement: do you think that the enforcement regime is necessary?

**Russell Langer:** On clause 4, as I said, with BDS in public bodies, that is something we have seen over the course of several years. Often, while the results have an impact on the Jewish community, that impact is not limited to the implementation of BDS; it is part of the febrile nature of the debate, bringing it into our public bodies. Once again, the specific point is that that tends

to be the only foreign policy with such debate in our public bodies in this country. Therefore, I understand the purpose of the clause, and to that extent definitely see the need for something.

In terms of the enforcement powers, absolutely—this Bill would have little merit without having adequate enforcement powers. Without them, it would lean towards a situation that we have now, whereby it is up to individual campaigners to raise these issues through judicial review and so on. Therefore, one of the key parts of this Bill is having proper enforcement powers to ensure that it is enforced.

**Q21 The Chair:** Before I bring in another Member, I think that this question has been partly answered but I would like to see whether we can get a clearer answer. Is there a distinction to be made, in terms of the provisions of the Bill, between on the one hand questioning the right of the state of Israel to exist and on the other hand being free to criticise the actions of the Israeli Government at any given moment in time?

**Russell Langer:** Absolutely—I am tempted to give you that one-word answer. There is absolutely no issue here in the Bill in terms of criticising Israel. The UK should have robust foreign policy on all issues, including Israel, and I do not think that anything should get in the way of that. However, what we have seen is a problematic picture, whereby the only country that any public body seeks to wish to criticise tends to be the one Jewish state in the world, and that I have an issue with. Nevertheless, I am not getting in the way of anyone here criticising Israel should they wish to do so.

**The Chair:** Thanks. That is very helpful. Chris Stephens.

**Q22 Chris Stephens:** That was going to be my first question, so I will ask my second question instead. There is obviously a debate about this Bill, including within the Jewish community, and we have some representatives of the Jewish community who will put to us their view of the Bill, namely that it restricts freedom of expression rather than directly addressing the issue of antisemitism. I presume that both of you disagree with that. So, would you tell us why you disagree with other Jewish representatives who will give evidence to this Committee?

**Daniel Sugarman:** First, I would say that we do not believe that the Bill prevents freedom of expression, in that any individual and any private organisation will still have the absolute right to adopt a BDS motion or to carry forward the idea of BDS. We are essentially concerned that public bodies, which receive public funding, are being used to promote a foreign policy agenda that is different from that of His Majesty's Government. We find that extremely troubling and the idea that it is a freedom of speech issue is—I think for both of us, although I cannot speak for Russell—appears to be extremely misleading.

**Russell Langer:** Exactly. I will just add something to that. Neither of us would claim that the Jewish community is a homogenous community that will agree a single position on any piece of legislation, let alone this one, but we both sit here as representatives of national representative bodies, and this is the position that we have considered and come to.

**Q23 Kim Leadbeater:** Thank you for joining us this morning. Like all my colleagues, I abhor antisemitism, and I agree that if further measures are needed to eradicate it from public life, of course we will support them. However, is there not a risk that because this Bill very publicly singles out the state of Israel as a special case, it may provoke greater antisemitism, which is the very thing that none of us want to see?

**Russell Langer:** I have heard this argument and it is really important that it gets a clear answer, which is that antisemitism is not a response to Government legislation. It is not a criticism of the Israeli Government; antisemitism is the hatred of Jews. And I am really cautious about any argument that this piece of legislation would increase antisemitism. I think that it is an argument that we really need to steer clear of.

**Daniel Sugarman:** I would add that, from our point of view, the reason why it is right that Israel is singled out here is because, as far as I am aware, Israel is the only country that is regularly targeted for such boycotts via public bodies. No other country is targeted in such a manner. Therefore, it seems correct that there is some acknowledgement of that and some way to ensure that it does not happen.

**Q24 Kim Leadbeater:** And you do not have any concerns that this Bill could have a negative impact on communities within the UK?

**Russell Langer:** I think it will have a positive impact on communities here in the UK. Unfortunately, what we see here in the UK—it happens with other foreign issues, but it happens specifically with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—is that we see a foreign conflict affecting intercommunity relations here in the UK. Worst of all, we then see public bodies—it is a minority, but some public bodies—seeking to then get involved in that debate and make those tensions worse, when I think they should be getting involved to improve the situation. I completely agree with you, but I think I come to a different point.

**Daniel Sugarman:** It will certainly make things better for Jewish communities—particularly small Jewish communities—who have been in positions where they sometimes feel that, unless they vocally criticise Israel, as Jews, they will not get a hearing. I admit, I do not have a huge amount of sympathy for people who might feel that they no longer have the means to make such Jewish communities feel uncomfortable.

**Q25 Steve McCabe:** Good morning. When I first heard about the Government's intentions to legislate in this area, I understood it to be legislation to prevent public bodies from boycotting the state of Israel, which I welcomed. I just wonder whether you think that the Government have made life easier or more difficult for themselves by extending the range and scope of the Bill, or whether it would have been better to have concentrated on preventing the boycott of the state of Israel.

**Daniel Sugarman:** That is an excellent point, but I think that, had the Government focused specifically on Israel, and not on anything else, we would have seen some of the same people who are raising questions in general—well-meaning questions as to why Israel is singled out specifically in the Bill—and I think that the questions as to why only Israel was being focused on

would have been 1,000 times louder. I think it makes sense that the Government have widened the scope for this, while singling out Israel within the wider Bill.

**Russell Langer:** I would add that part of our reasoning to believe that public bodies should not be boycotting Israel is that it contravenes UK Government policy, and that it is a foreign-policy issue being taken up by public bodies. Therefore, I can understand the wider scope to tie that in to that national picture of public bodies not taking foreign-policy decisions contrary to national Government.

**The Chair:** Are there any further lines of questioning? We have time available if anybody wishes to pursue anything. In that case, although we did not take up a lot of your time, I think it gave members of the Committee an opportunity to air some of the points of principle as they presented, and to look at alternative points of view on. That has been really helpful, and, of course, you bring a perspective to this that is very focused on one specific community, but that is as it should be. We are very grateful for the light you have been able to shine on some of those difficult issues, which I know people are trying to cope with by being even-handed but also by operating on good, solid principles. Thank you very much indeed.

**Russell Langer:** Thank you very much for inviting us.

**The Chair:** Given that we are a little ahead of time, and one of the witnesses for the next session is not currently available, we will pause the proceedings.

10.13 am

*The Committee deliberated in private.*

### Examination of Witnesses

*Councillor Bob Deering and Councillor James Jamieson gave evidence.*

10.24 am

**The Chair:** We will now hear evidence from Councillor Bob Deering, the executive member for resources and performance at Hertfordshire County Council, and Councillor James Jamieson, the immediate past chair of the Local Government Association, who joins us via Zoom. We have until 10.55 am for this session. Can the witnesses kindly introduce themselves, so that we have it on the record?

**Councillor Deering:** My name is Bob Deering. As you have just said, I am the cabinet member for resources and performance at Hertfordshire County Council, which essentially means money.

**Councillor Jamieson:** Good morning. I am James Jamieson. I am a councillor in Central Bedfordshire. As noted earlier, I was the chairman of the Local Government Association until July, when my four-year term expired. Previously, I have been the leader of Central Bedfordshire Council.

**The Chair:** Just before we get into the questions, I think Bob Blackman would like to make a declaration of interest.

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** Thank you, Chair; apologies for being late at the beginning. I want to put on record that I am a vice-president of the Local

Government Association; obviously, we have witnesses here from the LGA. I am also the secretary to the all-party parliamentary group on British Jews, and I chair the all-party Britain-Israel parliamentary group. I am an officer of Conservative Friends of Israel, and I have been on trips to Israel sponsored by the Conservative Friends of Israel. I have also been on trips to the west bank and on others sponsored by other groups.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Q26 Felicity Buchan:** Can you tell us about previous attempts by councils to pass motions to boycott Israel? Do you agree that this legislation will help local councils to remain focused on their core functions, rather than being distracted by BDS campaigns, and give them clarity that they should avoid BDS campaigns?

**Councillor Deering:** I do not know whether it will disappoint you, but in Hertfordshire we have had very little agitation—if I can use the word—of this type. Ahead of me coming here today, we did the best that we could to check our records, and we think that there may have been some form of question or petition that may have come through in 2022 related to Israel. We then had something post the Ukrainian issue that related to Russia. We think that that is just about the limit of our experience in recent times, so maybe we do not have a lot of experience to draw on. We would say that that is a good thing, because in Hertfordshire we are trying to manage our finances in an objective and hopefully sensible way for the benefit of the residents of Hertfordshire, not for any particular lobby group, whichever it may be. My answer to your question is yes: what you are looking at here probably would be helpful.

If I may just add a rider, there is some crossover between what you are looking at here and procurement. I think we would be keen that no grey area emerges across those two areas of interest.

**Q27 The Chair:** Councillor Jamieson, is there anything you wanted to add to that, or are you happy with it?

**Councillor Jamieson:** I would also reflect that my personal experience in Central Bedfordshire is that we have not had motions of this nature relating to countries. Interestingly, we have had, on occasion, motions that would not be covered by this Bill, but which I would say were of a broader political nature and did not focus on what local government should be doing, which is delivering for our residents locally. My own personal view is that that is what councils should be focused on. Foreign policy really should be a matter for Government.

**Q28 Felicity Buchan:** There are exceptions in the Bill that permit investment decisions, such as labour market misconduct or environmental misconduct. Do you think that those are appropriate and are the right balance to strike?

**Councillor Deering:** That is quite a big question. I am conscious that you will be taking evidence from all sorts of people. I might provide you with a neutral answer, if I may. We can see why they are there. Again, I do not wish to be repetitious or boring, but really we simply try to run our finances as best we can. In principle, we do not want awkward issues to come up that make it difficult for us to run our finances in the way that we think is best for our residents.



**Councillor Jamieson:** I do think that it is important that pension funds—as is currently the regulation for pension funds—can take into account issues that would be of concern to their pension holders. That is right, and that is a carve-out, albeit it also has the carve-out—I cannot remember the exact wording—that effectively it must not have a significant financial impact. I think that is right. For instance, with things around the environment, people might have concerns when investing in certain companies. Local government has a public health duty and I could completely understand if certain councillors wanted to avoid investments in businesses that they deemed were harmful for public health. A classic example would potentially be the tobacco industry. I think it is important that we can still make those decisions.

**Q29 Felicity Buchan:** One final, holistic question: are you supportive of the Bill and why?

**Councillor Deering:** I think we are. I think we would support it for the central reason, which is that this country's foreign policy, it seems to us, should be made by Government and should therefore be a coherent, unified foreign policy, rather than being fragmented across goodness alone knows how many organisations across the country, thereby becoming disparate. So yes, we are supportive.

May I come back on something the previous witness has just said in relation to pensions? Our experience is that if we find that there is some degree of pressure, it is more likely to come in relation to pensions. Our pension fund is valued currently at about £6 billion, which is a lot of money. We have 115,000 members and 400 employers. We take our responsibilities for our pension extremely seriously and I have been on our pension committee for a number of years. We have from time to time had situations where people, exactly as has just been said, come along and say that we should not be investing in x or we should not be investing in y because. There is a degree of difficulty with that because we understand always where people are coming from, but clearly, in the pension world, we have a fiduciary duty to deliver—to put it loosely but broadly—the best pension we can for all the prospective beneficiaries of our pension scheme. That comes up from time to time.

At Hertfordshire, we have an extremely good pensions committee. It is cross-party, as you would expect, but it is not party political. The reason I have come back to this is because, of course, environmental, social and governance is an issue in all investment these days. All the advisers that advise us in relation to our pension investments have some facility to advise on ESG. It might be thought that that strays into that area—tobacco, coal or whatever it is—but ESG works its way through to value and you start to realise that, actually, it is an investment criterion because it affects the value of what you are investing. I thought I should just say that because that is probably our biggest experience in this area.

**Q30 Felicity Buchan:** Just a point of clarification: the Bill only prevents decisions being made on the basis of moral or political disapproval of states as opposed to banning fossil fuels or environmental matters. It does not cover that.

**Councillor Jamieson:** I am speaking personally here. This is not an LGA view, just to be clear. I think the principle of this legislation is absolutely fine and, in many ways, helpful because it enables people on a pension committee to be very clear that they cannot consider countries when looking at this. However, my caveat is that there are some details in the regulations that need clarifying and those are quite concerning. It is not the principle but some of the details and we just want to make sure that some of those are right.

**Q31 Alex Norris:** I would like to start by putting on record the thanks of Members of the Opposition Front Bench to Councillor Jamieson for his leadership of the Local Government Association. It is safe to say that it is a broad family of all parties and none, so that leadership in a single person is an exceptionally tricky job and I think you did a very good job of it. As I say, we are grateful for your leadership and your candour with us when we have asked you questions in the past. Thanks again for your and Councillor Deering's presence.

We speak a lot in this Parliament about transferring power from here to local communities, namely our local councils. The Bill very much transfers power from our local councils to this place. How do colleagues in the local government family feel about that?

**Councillor Jamieson:** Thank you very much for your kind words. As I should have mentioned in my little statement a moment ago, I am very vexed—and was very vexed as chairman of the Local Government Association—by the underlying trend of giving powers to local government with one hand and taking them away with multiple hands. I can genuinely understand why it is being done, but I do not like the fact that it is another example of central Government just eating away at the freedoms and devolution of local government, but there are far more contentious areas than this one in which I would argue that the Government have taken back powers.

**Councillor Deering:** My view is very similar. I do not know that in Hertfordshire we feel particularly that this is a power grab from us; I think we understand the rationale of the Bill, or the proposal. If we had more experience of problems in the area, maybe we would feel differently, but I think we would say that we are fairly relaxed about this.

**Q32 Alex Norris:** Clause 4 will restrict your ability not only to act, but to talk about whether you would have been inclined to act. That is quite a significant fetter on your free speech. How do you and your colleagues feel about being told by central Government what you can and cannot say?

**Councillor Deering:** My answer is very similar. Again, it could be because our experience of problems arising is quite limited, but we are broadly relaxed about the point that you are making. We can see the overarching objective of the proposed legislation.

**Councillor Jamieson:** This was one of the areas of detail about which I had a concern, because I think it only right that in a committee meeting people should be free to express views. The key question is what the decision of that committee is. That is what should be held to account, rather than the views that are expressed and rightly debated in the meeting.

We have two concerns. One is about the freedom to express those views in an appropriate manner during the meeting. The second concern is that we publish minutes of meetings. If those minutes faithfully record what somebody has said, would that breach the rules on expression of views? Those are two details that need to be sorted out, because we do want debate in a meeting. People should be able to express their view; the point is that when they come to make a decision, it is the decision that should be held to account, not what people said in the meeting.

**The Chair:** Six members of the Committee have indicated that they want to ask a question, so I will initially confine them to one question each. I am sure that members of the Committee have enough intellectual flexibility to be able to get everything they want to find out into a single question.

**Q33 Bob Blackman:** James, in your former role as chairman of the LGA, were you aware of circumstances that were discussed and debated by local authorities, or decisions that were made, that would be in contravention of the Bill when it becomes an Act?

**Councillor Jamieson:** I think the key question is the one that I have just spoken about. I am not particularly aware of any decisions, but I am aware that there have been debates. The key point that I am worried about is that I do not want those debates to be caught out, because it is right to debate things.

**Q34 Bob Blackman:** Can I just follow up on that point? There was an issue about Leicester. I wonder whether that was something that the LGA considered.

**The Chair:** I think that counts as a second question.

**Bob Blackman:** Well, it is a clarification.

**The Chair:** I did say that I was not going to allow second questions, but can somebody give a quick answer?

**Councillor Jamieson:** I will have to come back to you on that, Bob. I do not have the details of the Leicester discussion.

**Bob Blackman:** Okay.

**Q35 Steve McCabe:** As I understand it, any financial penalties for a local authority that falls foul of this legislation will fall on the council, which means that they will fall on the council tax payer. Do you think that that is fair? Is that likely to deter highly motivated individuals or groups?

**Councillor Deering:** I think it is my turn to go first, isn't it? Do I think it is fair? That is a very good question. I think ultimately it is the decision that Parliament will make on this on this Bill. As a broad matter of principle, I do not think it is inappropriate that if a standard is set and there is a failure to meet the standard, some consequence will follow, but it is for Parliament to determine quite what that standard will be and quite what the consequence will be. As a principle, I do not think we would have any difficulty with that. On the second part of your one question, I would not think that this issue would deter people from coming into public life in local government. That would be my personal view.

**Q36 Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con):** Councillors Deering and Jamieson, this question is to both of you. Councillor Deering, you said the point around pensions should not be political. In your experience as councillors, how much of an increase have you seen in talk about, for example, previous slavery, the environmental side, Israel and Palestine, China and Russia? How much more of this debate is happening at a local council level, as opposed to 10 years ago? Was this debate happening then? Is it becoming more prevalent?

**Councillor Deering:** Well, I do not quite go back 10 years in local government, so I cannot quite answer for that period. I became a county councillor in 2017, I think, but I have been involved in the finance and performance side more or less ever since day one. I would say that the answer to your question is: a bit. Not only is there slightly more of this discussion because of general issues and political issues, but also in part because all councils are under financial pressure and every now and again there is a view expressed by someone—from wherever they might be on the political spectrum—that, “There seems to be an awful lot of money in the pension fund, and can't that somehow be used?” Obviously that is inappropriate. In our council, everybody understands that, but it is a frustration that is expressed from time to time. Coming back to your question, yes, there is a little bit more of what you asked about, but maybe that is because there are an increasing number of events in the world that might lead to the thought being ventilated.

**Councillor Jamieson:** The modern world—with the increase in social media, the ability for electronic petitions and so forth—has meant that councils are subject to more petitioning and more demand from groups of the public. It is easier to put these things on the agenda than it was in the past, so I think it is inevitable that we are seeing more of whatever it is that we are talking about compared with 10 years ago; in fact, I can go back 14 years, so compared with 14 years ago.

**Q37 Kim Leadbeater:** I will pick up on a point that has kind of been covered already. Do you have anything further to add on the issue of freedom of speech, or any further concerns that this Bill will undermine local democracy by restricting what councils and councillors can say and do? You are very fortunate in your area if you have not been impacted by some of the more contentious issues that the Bill covers, but I have some concerns around freedom of speech for local representatives and undermining local government autonomy. Is there anything else you want to add?

**Councillor Deering:** Personally, I am a very big believer in freedom of speech, and just freedom. If I might make a huge point, it is one of the things that this country is pretty good at, actually. I am very strongly in favour of it and would not want to see it impinged, but we all need to find a way to work together and achieve objectives. I repeat that our institution is not particularly vexed about the issue that underlies your question; we can see it, but I do not know that we are vexed by it.

**Councillor Jamieson:** If I can come back to this—I am in danger of repeating myself—I do think it is important that there are some tweaks to the legislation. One is that writing the minutes of a meeting that reflect a view expressed in the meeting should not be a reason to be referred to the Pensions Regulator or for judicial



review. Also, if the reference to a decision having been “influenced” was changed to “substantially influenced”, that would make life a lot easier.

I also have a big concern with judicial reviews. My biggest area of experience with judicial reviews is in the planning system, where they can be hugely expensive and time-consuming. I really do not like the fact that councils will be subject to judicial reviews, which will make vexatious JRs and so forth much easier. We are covered by the Pensions Regulator, and if the legislation were changed to say that it is the Pensions Regulator that makes the decision, and the Pensions Regulator could then be judicially reviewed if somebody felt it had not made its decision correctly, that would reduce the risk of vexatious JRs. That should also be linked to who can claim that they have been impacted. At the moment, pretty much anybody in the UK is in a household where there is a ratepayer; does that mean that anybody can mount a challenge just on the basis that they are potentially influenced or potentially a taxpayer?

The definition of who can mount a JR should be tightened, then, but ideally we should remove the ability to JR councils for the decisions. We should be monitored by the regulator and complaints should be made to the regulator, which should make that decision. If the regulator makes a decision and a member of the public is not happy with that decision, they should JR the regulator, not the council. I think that would make people feel a lot more comfortable about expressing their views and not having a vexatious JR or worrying about whether a minute in a meeting might contravene the rules or whatever.

**The Chair:** The regulator might consider itself to be an exception to that rule.

**Q38 Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Some have suggested that it is rather pointless to implement a ban if you have a toothless enforcement regime. Do you agree that it therefore needs to be sufficiently robust if we are to introduce this regime?

**Councillor Deering:** If I may say so, I thought that Councillor Jamieson’s response to the previous question was very good, because the question went to freedom of speech but Councillor Jamieson talked about judicial review, and in effect you are talking about enforcement through judicial review.

I substantially endorse what Councillor Jamieson just said. From the practical point of view of a councillor—forgive me: no doubt some of you in the room have this experience, but perhaps some of you do not—JRs may very well not be vexatious but my goodness me they give rise to a huge amount of work. They involve huge cost exposures and they are very, very demanding on a council’s capacity. If there is to be a JR backdoor to this, it needs to be put together in a thoughtful and careful way.

Subject to that, of course, if you are creating a regime that requires application, there does need to be some enforcement mechanism. Yes, I agree with that.

**Councillor Jamieson:** There does need to be an enforcement mechanism, which is the whole point of the Pensions Regulator. That should have sufficient teeth. It covers a whole range of issues—not just this but other things—and in general it works reasonably well.

**Q39 Chris Stephens:** Do you both accept the principle of a political party stating in its manifesto prior to a council election how it would use procurement and investment policies to incentivise ethical business conduct that is human rights compliant? How would you answer those who have responded to this Committee and their criticism of the Bill that it will

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

**Councillor Deering:** I did not quite catch the very first part of your question—

**Chris Stephens:** I can say it again.

**Councillor Deering:** It is okay; I think I got the gist of it. In a way, that goes perhaps not to the heart of the Bill but somewhere reasonably close to its heart, doesn’t it? In effect, it goes to the question of whether local authorities or public bodies should be campaigning bodies. There are some interesting questions there, aren’t there? Of course, in the case of local authorities, their funding is all taxpayer funding, so there needs to be some balance to make sure that taxpayers’ money is spent in an appropriate manner. It seems to me, essentially, that that is one of the things that your Committee will be considering when you consider the Bill.

Personally, I would come back to the objective of the Bill, and I would say, as I have already said in this session, that it seems to me and us that the objective of the Bill is understandable: in so far as the country has foreign policy, that policy should be made centrally, and it should not be fractured into all sorts of different variations across the country.

**Q40 The Chair:** Councillor Jamieson, is there anything you want to add to that?

**Councillor Jamieson:** I think that, as with all these things, there are grey areas in this, but as a broad principle, national Government set foreign policy. I think that is appropriate and right. Local government provides services for its residents, and we want them to be the best that they possibly can be within the financial envelope, but we do have a wider responsibility, as Councillor Deering said earlier. ESG is a key part of some of our procurement and investment decisions, and procuring to support local businesses is also something that is really important. We need to be clear that those things are still allowed, but speaking personally, I would not support every local council having its own foreign policy. That would be inappropriate.

**The Chair:** We have a couple of minutes left in this session, if anybody has a question that they have not had the opportunity to ask. I call the Minister.

**Q41 Felicity Buchan:** There has been quite a lot of talk as to whether councillors can express their own views. The Bill applies only to public bodies, so a councillor can express their own view; it is simply that, if a councillor is talking on behalf of the local authority, they are covered by the Bill. In the light of that, are you comfortable with the Bill?

**The Chair:** Before I bring in the witnesses to answer that question, Bob Blackman has a very quick point.

**Bob Blackman:** It was a very quick point to Councillor Jamieson: could you clarify exactly what changes might be made to the Bill to clarify the regulations that you spoke about earlier?

**The Chair:** Thank you. Over to our witnesses.

**Councillor Jamieson:** First, I will write formally, Bob, so that there is no ambiguity on any of those changes, if that helps.

Minister, on the point about being able to speak freely, the question is, if someone is speaking in a debate and it is minuted, what does that mean? There needs to be clarity about what represents speaking as a councillor or speaking on behalf of a council. Minutes of a meeting are one area where, at the moment, it is ambiguous, so we need to be very clear that minutes of a meeting and opinions expressed in those minutes do not represent the views of the council; they are the views of the councillors, if that makes sense. That just needs clarifying.

On the couple of points I was making to you earlier, Bob, in order for a decision that has been made to be called into the Pensions Regulator, or whatever, it needs to have been substantially influenced, not just influenced. My third key point is that we should be regulated by the Pensions Regulator. You should not be able to JR a council on this matter. If you do not like the decision of the Pensions Regulator, you should JR the Pensions Regulator. That would save an awful lot of potentially vexatious JRs.

**The Chair:** Councillor Deering, is there anything that you briefly want to add?

**Councillor Deering:** I am sorry to embarrass Councillor Jamieson, but I think the points he has just made are very sound and sensible. Coming back to the question that led to that answer, yes, there is clearly a distinction between a council and councillors. Quite clearly, they are not the same thing.

**The Chair:** I am afraid that that brings us to the end of the time allotted for the Committee to ask questions. I thank both the witnesses, on behalf of the Committee, for steering an important path between freedom of speech and the responsibilities that pension funds have to pension fund holders past, present and future. It has been a really useful and informative session and I would like to thank you both very much for your contributions.

**Councillor Deering:** Thank you very much indeed.

**Councillor Jamieson:** Thank you.

### Examination of witness

*Hannah Weisfeld gave evidence.*

10.55 am

**The Chair:** We will now hear oral evidence from Hannah Weisfeld, director of Yachad. For this session we have until 11.10. Could the witness introduce herself, for the record?

**Hannah Weisfeld:** I am Hannah Weisfeld, the executive director of Yachad.

**Q42 Felicity Buchan:** I understand that Yachad does not support the BDS movement. Can you explain why?

**Hannah Weisfeld:** I guess I should start by clarifying who we are and what we do. We are a British Jewish organisation that works within the mainstream of Anglo-Jewry to build support for a political resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

We do not support or advocate for the BDS movement, because we believe that putting pressure on one side does not necessarily bring about a resolution to the conflict. However, we are very clear that we support the right to non-violent protest. While we do not support or advocate for the BDS movement, we support the rights of individuals to adopt methods of non-violent resistance to Israeli Government policy—and in fact to the policy of any Government anywhere in the world. So, we would not advocate for the movement, but we would absolutely advocate for the right of people to express their opinions and to apply pressure in a non-violent way.

**Q43 Felicity Buchan:** So do you think it is appropriate for councils to support the BDS movement, with all the implications of them getting distracted from their core function—clearly, foreign policy is a reserve function for the UK Government—and also the consequences in terms of bringing dissension to local communities?

**Hannah Weisfeld:** Well, I know that one of the motivations for this piece of legislation has been around community cohesion and the idea that debating issues that are contentious at a local level creates community dissonance and disagreement. There is a reverse to that, which is that when you crack down on the ability of people to express their opinion and to express it in local democracies, you can do the exact opposite, which is that rather than bring people together, you can create real disharmony among communities. That has been mentioned already in the Committee this morning. There has been a tiny number of examples of there being what we would refer to as BDS motions at a local government level and in public bodies. I would not be overstating the reality if I said that if this legislation passes in its current form, there will be BDS motions in public bodies all across the country where people try to test this legislation because they are so frustrated that their right to express an opinion has been clamped down on. If the motivation here is to create community cohesion, there is a very real worry that this is going to do the exact opposite.

**Q44 Felicity Buchan:** But this Bill does not apply to private individuals or private companies; it applies only to public authorities. The motivation behind the Bill is to have one reserved foreign policy that is run by His Majesty's Government, rather than local authorities which are tasked with providing local public services getting distracted away from their core functions.

**The Chair:** Could I just say that that is a statement, rather than a question?

**Felicity Buchan:** I am sorry; I was just about to say, do you agree?

**Hannah Weisfeld:** I do not think we have evidence, and the Committee has not just heard that the people representing local government have been particularly distracted. To me, the Bill is not really about that issue; it is about creating what I think will become quite a

nasty debate around Israel-Palestine, and I do not think that that is going to benefit the Jewish community particularly.

**The Chair:** This is a very short session and three people have signified that they want to ask questions. I will bring in Wayne David. Again, I ask Members to be concise in their questions and our witness to be equally concise in her answers.

**Q45 Wayne David:** Hannah, we have heard from the JLC and the Board of Deputies of British Jews that they are broadly supportive of the legislation as it stands. You have expressed your concern and reservations about it. Could you objectively give us an indication of what the feeling is among other Jewish organisations in Britain, and also among progressive voices inside Israel itself?

**Hannah Weisfeld:** Yes. This has been mentioned by colleagues, but there is obviously not a homogeneous opinion about anything inside the Jewish community, as there is not in any faith or minority community. I think it is important to mention, though, that Yachad is a member of the Board of Deputies, and there are a number of other organisations that are members of the Board of Deputies, or whose parent organisations are members of the Jewish Leadership Council, that have been very publicly opposed to this legislation.

I want to draw your attention particularly to the Union of Jewish Students, which is the main Jewish student body in the UK. It represents more than 9,000 students and more than 70 Jewish societies. At its last conference, which I think was in April, it passed a unanimous motion—among all 400 students, there was not one dissenting voice—that said:

“UJS reaffirms its support for the democratic right to non-violently protest and opposes the government’s proposed Boycott Bill which is a curtailment of that right, as well as presenting a risk to British Jewish communities and a setback to Israeli-Palestinian peace.”

One thing that has often been expressed is a concern about what is happening to young Jewish students on campus and the way that BDS affects them and interacts with their student experience. I do not think that there is a clearer expression of concern against this legislation than the one that I have just read to you. That has been echoed by four of the major Jewish youth organisations.

I should say that Jewish youth provision is very organised in the Jewish community. It is where Jewish youth groups produce the future leadership of the Jewish community; I think that if you were to speak to many people running Jewish communal organisations today, that is where they grew up inside the Jewish community. Four of the seven or eight major mainstream ones have come out very publicly against this legislation. Of those, three are the youth organisations of the major religious denominations within our community—the Reform movement, the Liberal movement and the Masorti movement, which are three of the four major strands of Jewish denominations.

So there is not unanimous support for this legislation. We are, obviously, also against it. There is a very ferocious debate, I would say, about the merits of whether the way in which you protect Jewish life in this country is by legislating against opinions that we do not agree with.

**Q46 Chris Stephens:** Hannah, I think you were present when I put this question earlier. You mentioned the Union of Jewish Students. As I understand it, your organisation and the Union of Jewish Students are on record as saying that this Bill restricts freedom of expression rather than directly addressing the issue of antisemitism, and you are both on record as saying that it does not address the very epidemic—that is, the evil of rising antisemitism—that it claims it wants to tackle. Could you expand on that further, please?

**Hannah Weisfeld:** I am not sure whether that is a direct quote—I am not sure whether those were our words or the words of the Union of Jewish Students—but our sense is that the Bill will severely limit freedom of speech, as has been mentioned a lot this morning. Clause 4 already gags the ability of local democracies to express their opinions. That is very troubling in a democratic society—the idea that we legislate against free speech. As Jews, we don’t do well in societies that clamp down on free speech, and I think that there is a really big debate in the community about that. There is a very big debate inside Israel about that, and inside Jewish communities in America, where there has been similar legislation.

I think it is worth drawing your attention to anti-boycott legislation that the Israeli Government passed in the Knesset in 2011. Some very mainstream Israeli political figures—people you will know—came out very strongly against it, such as Ruvi Rivlin, who was the last President of Israel, and Tzipi Livni and Dan Meridor. They were all very clear that clamping down on boycotts and doing so in a legislative way does not help Israel and does not solve questions of antisemitism. Dan Meridor, who was the Likud Deputy Prime Minister, said:

“This law helps in delegitimising Israel, and makes Israel look like a country that prohibits free speech. It is useless. Those who boycott are a small group of people. I oppose boycotts, but they should not be illegal.”

That is the kind of sentiment that we echo.

Going back to the Minister’s question about why we do not support BDS, it is possible to say that we do not support something but that we protect the rights of other people to have that opinion. That is a very important principle in a democratic country, and it is one that we—as an organisation that is committed to Israel, committed to Jewish life in Britain and committed to democracy—want to see being upheld, which is why we have an issue with this legislation.

**Q47 Kim Leadbeater:** You have talked a little bit about your concern about community relations in the UK as a result of this Bill; I think that that has been heard. What impact will the Bill have on your organisation’s work in Israel and Palestine?

**Hannah Weisfeld:** I do not know whether people have seen it, but a letter was sent by 14 human rights and civil society organisations in Israel that went both to the Opposition and to the Government. They were very clear—I think this is very important—that the current political climate in Israel, which people may or may not be following closely, is extremely dangerous. It is very, very problematic. There are hundreds of thousands of people protesting on a weekly basis. I read yesterday that the police estimate is that there have been 7 million attendees at protests for 35 weeks—not 7 million individuals, but 7 million appearances at protests—and there are very severe clampdowns on free speech.



In the last year, civil society organisations in Israel have already faced two attempts, I think, to severely curtail their funding and to shut down dissent against the Israeli Government. What our partners in Israel wrote to the Government here and to the Opposition is worth quoting from: “We know all too well the consequences of shutting down dissent and disagreement. Today in Israel, there is significant civil unrest involving weekly protests of hundreds of thousands of people, reservists refusing to show up for military service and companies divesting their funds out of Israel. This legislation is giving in to Israel’s far-right Government’s desire to shut down debate, protest and dissent.” Certainly on the ground in Israel, civil society organisations involved in protests see this legislation as a gift to the Benjamin Netanyahu Government.

I should add that there is huge concern in the Jewish community here about the ascendancy of Benjamin Netanyahu’s Government and the far right. Today, literally about two minutes ago, the Government Minister for Diaspora Affairs was just uninvited from JW3, the main Jewish community centre in London, because of his opinions and because of his far-right position. He was due to have a tour there at, I think, 5 or 6 o’clock this afternoon, but about five minutes ago he was uninvited. That is the depth of feeling in this community: 79% of people who were polled in July said that they disapprove of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

We have a community here and partners on the ground in Israel who are deeply worried about the direction of travel. What this Bill will do is say, “It is business as usual—not only business as usual, but we will give you a gift, which is forever to put Israel and the occupied territories beyond public scrutiny.” By keeping the clause that specifically lists Israel, the OPTs and the Golan Heights, we are saying that despite the fact that there are now Israelis divesting and dissolving companies and moving them outside Israel, there can never be any circumstances in which it is OK for public bodies in Britain to do that. I think that that is very, very troubling, given that I think everybody here is committed to Israel’s existence as a democratic and Jewish state.

**The Chair:** I am afraid that that brings us to the end of the allotted time for the Committee to ask questions. On behalf of the Committee, may I thank the witness for taking a position that does not necessarily conform to some of the other views that we have heard but that makes it absolutely clear what you stand for? We are very grateful for that.

**Hannah Weisfeld:** Thank you for inviting me.

#### Examination of witness

*James Gurd gave evidence.*

11.9 am

**The Chair:** We will now hear oral evidence from James Gurd, executive director of Conservative Friends of Israel. We have until 11.25 am for this session. Could the witness please introduce himself for the record?

**James Gurd:** With pleasure. Good morning. My name is James Gurd, and I am the executive director of Conservative Friends of Israel, which works to promote a strong bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Israel.

**Q48 Felicity Buchan:** Can you set out why you think this Bill is needed?

**James Gurd:** I think this Bill is a very welcome piece of legislation and will go a long way towards reasserting the UK Government’s reserved foreign policy powers. In recent years—over the past decade, really—we have seen that being challenged by an increasing number of public bodies pursuing very divisive BDS activities in the UK. Indeed, the Government have made repeated efforts through the issuance of guidance to try to challenge that; I think the Government have now finally, rightly, reached the decision that legislative action is required.

Those BDS activities, as we have heard from a number of other witnesses this morning, have led to community division. I do not see it as the place of public bodies to be, effectively, picking one side in a dispute over a foreign policy matter that is several thousand miles away. The Jewish community—I believe, as a non-Jew—has felt increasingly isolated in the United Kingdom throughout this process. It is probably worth stating that no UK political party is on the record as supporting BDS, so I would hope that there will be broad support for this.

I believe that this legislation will also have a positive effect for the UK. The UK has very strong economic relations with Israel. Israel makes a very important contribution to this country’s national health service, for example, and BDS has had a chilling effect on those relations and on the prospect of further improved relations over recent years. I know that that is something that CFI certainly welcomes in the Government’s efforts to secure a free trade deal with Israel.

I believe that the Bill would also support the UK Government’s belief in a two-state solution. That is something that I believe is undermined by BDS. It is a movement that is, I believe, associated more with extremists. Certainly you can look at the Palestinian BDS National Committee, which is the organising body over in the Palestinian territories. That body includes organisations such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which are terror groups proscribed here in the United Kingdom. Within the UK context, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign is seen as one of the most prominent organisers of the BDS activities here in the United Kingdom. It is an organisation that until a few years ago—I feel this is probably worth putting on the record—had a logo presenting a future Palestinian state on top of a state of Israel. So I believe that the Bill will have a number of positive implications.

**Q49 Felicity Buchan:** You have addressed the impact that BDS campaigns can have on community cohesion and, clearly, in driving antisemitism. Do you therefore think it important that we specify in the Bill that Israel can only be exempted from this Bill through primary as opposed to secondary legislation?

**James Gurd:** I believe that that is a reasonable approach that the Government have decided to take, and I believe it is a reaction to the fact that BDS is unique in its singular focus on the state of Israel. We have seen, as a number of others have referred to this morning, a House of Commons briefing note that pointed out that of all recorded examples of boycott activity pursued by public bodies in the United Kingdom, they are targeting exclusively Israel, so there is clearly a unique problem here.

When you look at the Bill in a broader sense, it is a Bill that has universal application. Foreign policy is a reserved matter for the UK Government; it is not, I believe, the place of public bodies to be pursuing that. They are there to represent all their diverse communities equally and to ensure that they are fiducially responsible in how they deliver that.

**Q50 Nicola Richards:** We have heard concerns from others giving evidence today about people who wish to disagree politically with things that happen in Israel. People should have the right to freedom of speech on those matters. In your evidence, however, you make it clear that the aims of BDS are to cut off economic and cultural ties. Do you believe that the nature of BDS is totally different from making a political argument against a Government and policies and activities that happen in another state? Is it that difference that makes it so damaging to the Jewish community, in your view?

**James Gurd:** We have seen a growth in BDS activities in public bodies over the last decade. As I have referred to before, BDS is uniquely discriminatory in nature, as it only targets Israel.

I first encountered BDS while I was at university. I was at King's College in '09, which coincided—as is so often the case when there is conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories—with a spike in BDS interest. That led to a series of BDS activities, which students were perfectly entitled to do and which they will be able to continue to do under the Bill, but it led to a series of antisemitic incidents on campus. The head of the university had to send around a communication to all members of the student body to call it out. It has since gone mainstream, in the sense that it has left the student body politic and entered public bodies here in the UK, so it has grown as a challenge.

Having said that, it is worth putting it on the record that the Bill will in no way challenge the right of a private individual or a private company to pursue BDS. They are perfectly entitled to do so if they wish.

**Q51 Wayne David:** I think everyone would agree that foreign policy is a reserved matter in the United Kingdom, but there is a danger of assuming that the United Kingdom is still a unitary state, which it is not. We can talk about foreign policy on the one hand, but on the other hand we talk about procurement policy, much of which is devolved, whether that is to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Senedd or the Northern Ireland Assembly. There have been frictions, for example over Brexit, about where exactly the line is drawn in terms of a devolution settlement.

Do you see it as a difficulty that there is a lack of clarity in the legislation, because the assumption is that Britain is Britain? Well, Britain is not Britain; Britain is a number of nations. There is a concern, certainly among the Welsh Senedd, that that factor has not been taken into account with regard to the legislation.

I will give a specific example of a concern from Northern Ireland, where public service pension schemes are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. For this legislation to be introduced in Northern Ireland requires a legislative consent motion. The trouble is that there is not a Northern Ireland Assembly sitting to give it. I therefore presume that this legislation would not apply to Northern Ireland. Is that your understanding? Do

you think that the issue of devolution and the nations of the United Kingdom is not fully taken into account in the Bill?

**James Gurd:** I am not sure that I am perfectly placed to comment on Stormont not sitting or on devolution, but I believe that the UK Government are right in taking a UK-wide approach on this. It was a manifesto commitment made in 2019 to all citizens of the United Kingdom.

If we look at the evidence, it is in Wales and Scotland that we have seen perhaps the most BDS activities by public bodies. That includes anything from West Dunbartonshire banning the inclusion of the books of Israeli authors in its libraries in 2009, through to the Labour Welsh Government two years ago, I believe, announcing their intention to release a procurement advice note in relation to economic activities in procurement practices with Israeli settlements, the sole thing identified as a problem within that process. That was subsequently dropped following a backlash from organisations including the Jewish Leadership Council and the Board of Deputies. The First Minister of Wales met them to hear their concerns. This is clearly a very live problem, but it is a UK-wide problem. I would support the UK Government in whatever approach they deemed best to tackle it.

**Wayne David:** Can I ask a brief supplementary?

**The Chair:** Before you do, is there anybody else? [*Interruption.*] I will bring in Chris Stephens and come back to you if there is time.

**Chris Stephens:** I will yield to Mr David to pursue his supplementary.

**Q52 Wayne David:** I am someone who has been on record many, many times as being totally opposed to BDS, but I also respect the devolution settlements. Irrespective of the issue, is it not right for the devolved institutions to exercise the powers that they have without an overbearing influence from central Government?

**James Gurd:** My understanding is that foreign policy is still a reserved matter for His Majesty's Government in those situations. It is only right and proper that the democratically elected Government of this country get to determine what those foreign policy positions are. To repeat what I said earlier, this will have a very significant effect in countering the divisive nature of BDS in all corners of the United Kingdom.

We have seen the Jewish community on the receiving end of repeated efforts to pursue boycotts of Israel or indeed companies operating within the contested territories—the Occupied Palestinian Territories—but that has often led to the targeting of the Jewish community directly. This is not just an Israel-Palestine issue; it feeds into the persecution of and discrimination against the UK's Jewish community. The Tricycle Theatre in London cancelled its hosting of the UK Jewish Film Festival one year. As was cited earlier, there was the case of Sainsbury's in Holborn removing kosher goods from its shelves due to pressure from BDS activities. This is a problem that has been left unaddressed for too long. There is a clear problem, and I believe that this is the right approach to respond to it.



**Q53 Chris Stephens:** James, you said in answer to one of my colleagues' questions that you believe the Bill would help to solidify international support for a two-state solution, which was a curious statement. The international community broadly supports a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine and opposes the continued occupation of Gaza, the west bank and East Jerusalem. What rights and methods should I and public bodies pursue to press for that change?

**The Chair:** I am going to close the session in two minutes, so it would be good to have a concise answer, please.

**James Gurd:** Understood, Chair, but that is a big old question. I do believe that the Bill will contribute to wider efforts to promote peace. The UK Government are committed to a two-state solution. I believe that BDS is inherently divisive. As I have said already, the organisations affiliated with it within the Palestinian territories include the likes of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which are proscribed terror groups here in the UK.

To cite a personal experience, I visited SodaStream, which is an Israeli company that makes products that have the ability to make fizzy drinks. It was based in the

west bank, but following pressure from BDS activities over a sustained period, it had to move. The factory employed 600 Palestinian workers, who would have received greater work benefits and salaries than anywhere in the Palestinian economy. It had to be moved to Israel, where only 100 of those Palestinian workers were able to continue working. I spoke to some of those Palestinian workers myself on a CFI visit to Israel, and they were deeply unhappy about the fact that so many of their family and friends had lost their jobs as a result of that BDS activity.

Indeed, Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority President, is on record as having said that he is also opposed to BDS. This is not some sort of peace movement. It is a deeply divisive movement that seeks to delegitimise the state of Israel. The UK and the UK Government should have absolutely no truck with it.

**The Chair:** With excellent timing, that brings us to the end of this session.

11.25 am

*The Chair adjourned the Committee without Question put (Standing Order No. 88).*

*Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.*

