PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

CRIME AND POLICING BILL

Fourteenth Sitting

Thursday 8 May 2025

(Afternoon)

CONTENTS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Monday 12 May 2025

The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: Sir Roger Gale, † Mark Pritchard, Emma Lewell, Dr Rosena Allin-Khan

† Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex *(Cardiff West)* (Lab)
† Bishop, Matt *(Forest of Dean)* (Lab)
† Burton-Sampson, David *(Southend West and Leigh)* (Lab)
† Cross, Harriet *(Gordon and Buchan)* (Con)
† Davies-Jones, Alex *(Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice)*
† Johnson, Dame Diana *(Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention)*
Jones, Louise *(North East Derbyshire)* (Lab)
† Mather, Keir *(Selby)* (Lab)
† Phillips, Jess *(Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department)*
† Platt, Jo *(Leigh and Atherton)* (Lab/Co-op)
† Rankin, Jack *(Windsor)* (Con)
† Robertson, Joe *(Isle of Wight East)* (Con)
† Sabine, Anna *(Frome and East Somerset)* (LD)
† Sullivan, Dr Lauren *(Gravesham)* (Lab)
Taylor, David *(Hemel Hempstead)* (Lab)
† Taylor, Luke *(Sutton and Cheam)* (LD)
† Vickers, Matt *(Stockton West)* (Con)

Robert Cope, Claire Cozens, Adam Evans, *Committee Clerks*

† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Thursday 8 May 2025

(Afternoon)

[Mark Pritchard *in the Chair*]

Crime and Policing Bill

New Clause 5

Pornographic content: online harmful content

"(1) A person commits an offence if they publish or allow or facilitate the publishing of pornographic content online which meets the criteria for harmful material under section 368E(3)(a) and section 368E(3)(b) of the Communications Act 2003.

(2) An individual guilty of an offence is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both);

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine or both.

(3) A person who is a UK national commits an offence under this section regardless of where the offence takes place.

(4) A person who is not a UK national commits an offence under this section if any part of the offence takes place in the UK.

(5) The platform on which material that violates the provisions in this section is published can be fined up to £18 million or 10 percent of their qualifying worldwide revenue, whichever is greater.

(6) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the Act receiving Royal Assent, make regulations appointing one or more public bodies (the appointed body) to monitor and enforce compliance by online platforms with this section.

(7) Regulations made under subsection 6 may provide the appointed body appointed by the Secretary of State with the powers, contained in sections 144 and 146 of the Online Safety Act 2023, to apply to the court for a Service Restriction Order or Access Restriction Order (or both).

(8) The appointed body must, within six months of being appointed by the Secretary of State, lay before Parliament a strategy for monitoring, and enforcing, compliance with the provisions in this section.

(9) The appointed body must lay before Parliament an annual report, outlining the enforcement activity undertaken in relation to this section."—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause extends safeguarding requirements for pornography distributed offline to pornography distributed online, making it an offence to publish online harmful material under section 368E(3)(a) and section 368E(3)(b) of the Communications Act 2003.

Brought up, read the First time, and Question proposed (this day), That the clause be read a Second time.

2 pm

Question again proposed.

The Chair: I remind the Committee that with this we are discussing the following:

New clause 6—*Pornographic content: duty to verify age—*

"(1) A person (A) commits an offence if they publish or allow or facilitate the publishing of pornographic content online where it has not been verified that—

(a) every individual featuring in pornographic content on the platform has given their consent for the content in which they feature to be published or made available by the service; and/or

(b) every individual featuring in pornographic content on the platform has been verified as an adult, and that age verification completed before the content was created and before it was published on the service; and/or

(c) every individual featured in pornographic content on the platform, that had already published on the service when this Act is passed, is an adult.

(2) It is irrelevant under (1a) whether the individual featured in pornographic material has previously given their consent to the relevant content being published, if they have subsequently withdrawn that consent in writing either directly or via an appointed legal representative to—

(a) the platform, or

(b) the relevant regulator where a contact address was not provided by the platform to receive external communications.

(3) If withdrawal of consent under (2) has been communicated in writing to an address issued by the platform or to the relevant public body, the relevant material must be removed by the platform within 24 hours of the communication being sent.

(4) An individual guilty of an offence is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both);

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine (or both).

(5) A person who is a UK national commits an offence under this section regardless of where the offence takes place.

(6) A person who is not a UK national commits an offence under this section if any part of the offence takes place in the UK.

(7) The platform on which material that violates the provisions in this section is published can be fined up to £18 million or 10 percent of their qualifying worldwide revenue, whichever is greater.

(8) The Secretary of State will appoint one or more public bodies to monitor and enforce compliance by online platforms with this section, with the relevant public body—

(a) granted powers to impose business disruption measures on non-compliant online platforms, including but not limited to service restriction (imposing requirements on one or more persons who provide an ancillary service, whether from within or outside the United Kingdom, in relation to a regulated service); and access restriction (imposing requirements on one or more persons who provide an access facility, whether from within or outside the United Kingdom, in relation to a regulated service).

(b) required to act in accordance with regulations relating to monitoring and enforcement of this section issued by the Secretary of State, including but not limited to providing the Secretary of State with a plan for monitoring and enforcement of the provisions in this section within six months of the bill entering into force, and publishing annual updates on enforcement activity relating to this section.

(9) Internet services hosting pornographic content must make and keep a written record outlining their compliance with the provisions of this section. Such a record must be made summarised in a publicly available statement alongside the publishing requirements in section 81(4) and (5) of the Online Safety Act."

This new clause makes it a requirement for pornography websites to verify the age and permission of everyone featured on their site, and enable withdrawal of consent at any time.

New clause 7—*Pornographic Content: Duty to safeguard against illegal content—*

"(1) The Online Safety Act is amended as follows.

(2) In section 80(1), after 'service' insert 'and the illegal content duties outlined in Part 3 of this Act.'"

This new clause extends the illegal content duties in Part 3 of the Act to all internet services which are subject to the regulated provider pornographic content duties in Part 5 of the Act.

New clause 51—*Amendment of Possession of extreme pornographic images—*

"(1) Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (possession of extreme pornographic images) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (7) after paragraph (a) insert—

'(aa) an act which affects a person's ability to breath and constitutes battery of that person.'"

This new clause would extend the legal definition of the extreme pornography to include the depiction of non-fatal strangulation.

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 9

CCTV ON RAILWAY NETWORK

"(1) It is a legal requirement for CCTV cameras across the railway network in England and Wales to be capable of enabling immediate access by the British Transport Police and relevant Police Forces.

(2) All footage retained by CCTV cameras on the railway network must remain accessible to the British Transport Police and relevant Police Forces for the entirety of the retention period.

(3) The retention period specified in subsection (2) is 30 calendar days.

(4) Further to subsection (1), the Secretary of State must publish a report, within three months of the passing of this Act, specifying a compatibility standard that will facilitate CCTV access for the British Transport Police and any Police Force in England and Wales."—*(Luke Taylor.)*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I rise to speak in support of new clause 9, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper). We seek a simple but critical improvement to public safety: the interoperability of CCTV systems across our railway network. Currently, rail operators maintain CCTV systems that are not integrated with British Transport police or the local territorial forces in the areas they serve. This technological gap is not just a logistical inconvenience, but an active barrier to justice and public protection.

This issue came to light in a very practical context. My hon. Friend became aware of a spike in bike thefts at St Albans City station. Despite the presence of cameras at the station, the police faced severe limitations on their access to the footage they needed, which delayed investigations and reduced the chance of recovering the stolen property. At the other end of the Thameslink line, at Sutton station, I have had an expensive e-bike stolen and two other bikes dismantled—the theft of a saddle made my ride home from work one night particularly uncomfortable.

This is not just about my cycling challenges, but about broader criminal activity on our railways, including antisocial behaviour, assaults and, most gravely, threats to the safety of women and vulnerable people using our public transport. When someone is attacked or harassed on a platform or in a train carriage, time is of the essence, and having the ability to quickly retrieve and share CCTV footage can make the difference between justice and impunity. New clause 9 would fix this problem by requiring rail operators to ensure that their CCTV systems are compatible with law enforcement systems, enabling faster, more co-ordinated responses when incidents occur. In an age when we expect smart, connected infrastructure, this is a common-sense step that aligns with public expectations and operational necessity. In the age of Great British Railways, it would be an opportunity to streamline and standardise the systems used by our currently fragmented rail system into a single, interoperable system that improves the experience and safety of riders.

I urge the Committee to support the new clause not because it would improve security on paper, but because it would make a tangible difference to the safety and confidence of passengers across the rail network.

Matt Vickers: Requiring CCTV on the rail network to meet police access and retention standards could bring important benefits for public safety and criminal justice. Ensuring footage is readily accessible to the police would help to deter crime, enable faster investigations and support prosecutions with reliable evidence.

Victims and witnesses benefit when their accounts can quickly be corroborated, and cases are more likely to be resolved effectively. Standardising CCTV systems across train operators would also reduce inefficiencies, removing delays that can occur due to incompatible formats or outdated technology. In high-risk areas or busy urban transport hubs, this kind of clarity and consistency could make a real difference to public confidence and police capability.

No doubt some will argue that increased surveillance on public transport raises questions about privacy and civil liberties, particularly if passengers feel that they are being constantly monitored. Also, rail operators may face high financial and logistical burdens if they are required to overhaul existing CCTV infrastructure to meet new standards. For smaller operators in particular, the cost of compliance could be significant, potentially impacting service provision or ticket prices.

I would be grateful if the Liberal Democrats told us whether this requirement would apply to all train operating companies, including heritage railways and smaller, regional operators. What specific technical or operational standards would CCTV systems be expected to meet, and how would those be determined or updated over time? Have they reviewed how many operators already meet or fall short of the proposed standards, and what level of upgrade would typically be required? Have they assessed the financial implications for train operators, and would they expect any Government funding or support to assist implementation?

The Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson): New clause 9 would introduce a requirement that all CCTV camera images on the railway be made immediately accessible to the British Transport police and the relevant local Home Office police force. I am sympathetic to the cases that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, shared with the Committee. I particularly sympathise with his plight and predicament when his saddle was stolen; having to cycle home without a saddle must have been incredibly painful, so I fully welcome the aims of

[Dame Diana Johnson]

this new clause. We know that lack of immediate access to railway CCTV camera images has been a significant issue for the British Transport police, as it may reduce their ability to investigate crime as quickly as possible. However, I do not believe that legislation is necessary to address the issue. Let me explain why.

My colleagues at the Department for Transport are looking to implement a system that will provide remote, immediate access for the BTP, Home Office forces and the railway industry where relevant. As I said, that does not need legislation. What is needed is a technological solution and the resources to provide for that. I am sure that the hon. Member will continue to press the case with the Department for Transport, and for updates on the progress of the work, but for now, I invite him to withdraw his new clause.

Luke Taylor: In response to the specific comments from the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Stockton West, this measure relates entirely to existing footage and would allow access to existing footage. I thank the Minister for addressing the points made. At this point, are happy to withdraw the new clause. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 12

DOMESTIC ABUSE AGGRAVATED OFFENCES

"(1) Any criminal offence committed within England and Wales is domestic abuse aggravated, if—

(a) the offender and the victim are personally connected to each other, and

(b) the offence involves behaviour which constitutes domestic abuse.

(2) In this section—

(a) 'domestic abuse' has the meaning given by section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and

(b) 'personally connected' has the meaning given by section 2 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021."—*(Luke Taylor.)*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Luke Taylor: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

As things stand, there is no specific criminal offence of domestic abuse in England and Wales. Instead, such cases are prosecuted under a patchwork of broader offences: common assault, actual bodily harm and coercive control. While those charges may reflect elements of abuse, they too often fail to capture the sustained pattern nature of domestic violence.

The legal ambiguity has far-reaching consequences. Under the Government's own SDS40—standard determinate sentences 40%—scheme, high-risk offenders, especially those who pose a continued threat to public safety, should be exempt from early release, but owing to the lack of specific domestic abuse offences, perpetrators charged under more general categories, such as common assault, remain eligible for early release. In effect, abusers walk free while their victims live in fear. That is not a technical oversight; it is a systemic failure, and it has rightly been challenged by Women's Aid, Refuge, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and other voices we cannot afford to ignore.

That is why I welcome both the proposed amendment to the SDS40 scheme and the Domestic Abuse (Aggravated Offences) Bill, brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde). That Bill would create a defined set of domestic abuse aggravated offences, recognising the context of abuse and making such offences clearly identifiable in the criminal justice system. If adopted, the reform would not only enhance the visibility of domestic abuse, but close the dangerous loopholes in relation to early release. It would bring the law into alignment with the lived experiences of victims and send a clear message: domestic abuse is not a private matter; it is a public crime and will be treated as such.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Davies-Jones): I personally thank the hon. Member for Eastbourne for his tireless commitment to, and campaigning on, tackling domestic abuse. He is right to highlight the need to identify and track domestic offenders better in our justice system. It is a crucial issue. I welcome this important discussion and the many conversations that I have had with him in my ministerial office about how best to collaborate to achieve this.

New clause 12 seeks to introduce a new label, "domestic abuse aggravated", which will apply to any offence where the offender and victim are personally connected and both aged 16 or over. Offences ranging from assault to fraud would be designated as domestic abuse aggravated where they met the statutory definition of domestic abuse. We recognise the intent behind the new clause and are deeply sympathetic to it; we agree that better categorisation and management of domestic abuse offenders is crucial. However, there are a number of important considerations that need to be carefully worked through to ensure that any new approach is effective and workable, and that it will actually help victims.

There are significant questions that need to be answered if we are to ensure that any reform strengthens, rather than complicates, our response to domestic abuse. While the new clause introduces a new label, it does not set out a clear mechanism for how the designation would be applied in practice. As proposed, it creates a category of domestic abuse offender by virtue of their offence, but does not set out legal or operational implications for charging or sentencing. Without clarity about its function, there is a risk that the provision will introduce unnecessary complexity in the legal framework, in particular through how it operates alongside the Sentencing Council's existing guidelines, in which domestic abuse is already recognised as an aggravating factor. Courts therefore already consider imposing tougher sentences when an offence occurs in a domestic setting.

Despite those concerns, the hon. Gentleman raises an important issue, and one that I have discussed at length with the hon. Member for Eastbourne. I assure both hon. Members that work is under way across Government on how we can better identify domestic abuse offenders. This is a complex issue, and it is right that we take the time to ensure that any changes are robust and deliver meaningful improvements, but we are on the case.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne can rest assured that the Government are actively considering the issue. I would be glad to work with him—I extend that invitation to any Member of the House—on identifying the most effective way forward. While we do not believe the new clause is the right solution at this time, we welcome ongoing discussions on how best to improve the categorisation and tracking of domestic abuse offenders within the justice system. For those reasons, I ask that new clause 12 be withdrawn.

Luke Taylor: We would like to press the new clause to a vote, please.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2, Noes 9.

Division No. 20]

AYES

Sabine, Anna	Taylor, Luke

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 13

PREVENTION OF RESALE OF STOLEN GPS PRODUCTS

"(1) The Equipment Theft Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) In Section 1(2)(b), after 'commercial activities' insert, 'including GPS equipment'."—*(Anna Sabine.)*

This new clause extends the Equipment Theft Act 2023 to specifically include the theft of GPS equipment.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Anna Sabine (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 27—*Fines for sale of stolen equipment*—

"(1) The Equipment Theft Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 3 (Enforcement), subsection (2) at end insert 'equal to—

(a) the replacement cost of the equipment,

(b) the cost of repairing any damage caused during the theft, and

(c) the trading losses incurred by the offended party.'"

This new clause would ensure the fine charged to a person convicted of equipment theft would reflect the cost to a tradesman of replacing their equipment, repairing any damage to their equipment or property, and any business they've lost as a result.

New clause 32—*Theft from farms*—

"(1) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(2) In Chapter 3, Aggravating Factors, after section 72 insert—

'(72A) Theft from farms

(1) This section applies where the court is considering the seriousness of an offence specified in section 7 of The Theft Act 1968.

(2) If the theft was of high value farming equipment, the court—

(a) must treat that fact as an aggravating factor, and

(b) must state in open court that the offence is so aggravated.

(3) For the purposes of this section—

"high value farming equipment" is machinery and tools used in agricultural operations to enhance productivity and efficiency, with a value of at least £10,000.'"

This new clause makes theft of high value farming equipment an aggravating factor on sentencing.

New clause 96—*Theft of tools from tradesmen*—

"(1) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(2) In Chapter 3, Aggravating Factors, after section 72 insert—

'72A Theft of tools from tradesmen

(1) This section applies where the court is considering the seriousness of an offence specified in section 7 of the Theft Act 1968.

(2) If the theft was of tools from a tradesman, the court—

(a) must treat that fact as an aggravating factor, and

(b) must state in open court that the offence is so aggravated.'"

This new clause would make the theft of tools from a tradesman an aggravating factor.

New clause 98—*Enforcement plan for sale of stolen equipment at car boot sales*—

"(1) The Equipment Theft Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 3 (Enforcement), after subsection (3) insert—

'(3A) An enforcement authority must put in place an enforcement plan to enforce regulations made under section 1 at temporary markets in their area.'"

This new clause would require local councils or local trading standards organisations to put in place an enforcement plan for the sale of stolen equipment at temporary markets, which includes car boot sales.

Anna Sabine: I rise to speak to new clause 13, but the Liberal Democrats also support Opposition new clauses 27, 32, 96 and 98, which are grouped with it.

We want to amend the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 specifically to include the theft of global positioning system or GPS equipment. That may sound like a technical issue, but for farmers across the country, such as those in my Frome and East Somerset constituency, it is an urgent and deeply practical one. GPS units are no longer optional extras—they are essential tools for modern farming, guiding tractors and combine harvesters with precision, improving productivity and ensuring that key agricultural work happens on time. Yet these high-tech units, typically costing over £10,000 each, have become a prime target for increasingly organised criminal gangs. In 2023 alone, NFU Mutual reported that claims for GPS theft soared by 137%, reaching an estimated £4.2 million. These are not isolated incidents: intelligence shows that gangs often target multiple farms in one night, stealing with precision and frequently returning weeks later to take the newly installed replacements.

2.15 pm

Existing legislation does not explicitly cover GPS theft, making it harder for law enforcement to prioritise and tackle these crimes effectively. The new clause would fix that, closing a loophole and giving police the clarity they need to take robust action. Let us be clear: the impact of this crime is not just financial. It causes major disruption to food production, delays harvesting and erodes the confidence of rural communities, which already feel under-protected. By explicitly including

GPS equipment under the 2023 Act, we send a strong message: our farmers will not be left exposed and our legislation will keep pace with both technology and the evolving tactics of organised crime. I commend the new clause to the Committee.

Matt Vickers: New clauses 27, 96 and 98 seek to tackle the real and growing problem of tool theft from tradesmen. At this point, I declare an interest as the son of a builder. This country is built on the back of tradesmen. They are the small businesses that make a huge contribution to our economy and build the world around us. I have seen at first hand the nightmare that occurs when guys or girls in the trade get up at daft o'clock to go to work and earn a living, only to find that their van or lock-up has been broken into and their equipment stolen. They lose the equipment, their vehicle gets damaged and they lose a day's work. In fact, they can lose days or weeks of work, and the nature of their employment often means that that is a real financial loss.

Not only do these hard-working people suffer that loss, but they know that little is done to stop this ever-increasing problem. I have spoken to tradesmen and key campaigners on this issue, such as Shoaib Awan and the team at Fix Radio, who have been standing up for tradesmen across the country, organising a rally in Westminster and ensuring that their voice is heard. Many people will have seen my good friend the shadow Justice Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), raising this issue on GB News and talking about the failure of agencies to tackle it.

Shoaib has highlighted the fact that not only do people wake up to the consequences and costs of such thefts, but all too often, they go to a car boot sale at the weekend to see the thieves selling the stolen goods in broad daylight with little, if any, action from the police and trading standards. I ask anyone who does not think that these amendments are necessary to listen to Shoaib or watch the coverage on GB News, should they so wish. As more thieves get away with and profit from this crime, so its prevalence continues to increase. Since Sadiq Khan became mayor, tool theft in London has gone up by 60%. I hope Members will consider these amendments.

New clause 27 strengthens the deterrent effect of the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 by aligning financial penalties with the real-world losses experienced by tradespeople and small businesses when their tools or equipment are stolen. The current enforcement provisions may result in fines that are disconnected from the actual harm caused, particularly to self-employed individuals or small and medium-sized enterprises, where the loss of equipment can be financially devastating. The new clause introduces a fairer and more effective approach by unequivocally requiring courts to impose fines that reflect the full replacement cost of the stolen equipment, the cost of repairing any damage done during the theft and the trading loss incurred while the equipment was unavailable, whether it be cancelled jobs, lost contracts or reputational harm.

Tool theft has reached crisis levels in the UK, with one in 10 tradespeople expected to experience tool theft this year alone. Many of the victims have already endured multiple incidents and, alarmingly, self-employed tradespeople are 38% more likely than their employed counterparts to fall victim to this type of crime. Yet, despite the prevalence of this crime, only 1% of stolen tools are ever recovered.

The consequences of tool theft go far beyond the immediate loss of equipment. Victims face an average cost of £2,730 to replace stolen tools, £1,320 in vehicle or property repairs and £1,900 in lost work and business disruption—a combined blow of nearly £6,000. More than four in five victims report a negative impact on mental health, with over one third describing it as "major". That is no small issue, especially in an industry already suffering one of the UK's highest suicide rates. More than 40% of victims say the theft has damaged their business reputation, and one in 10 say the reputational impact was significant. Frustration with the police and the legal response is widespread. Nearly one quarter of tradespeople—22.7%—do not even bother reporting tool theft to authorities, citing poor outcomes and a lack of follow-up.

According to figures from CrimeRate, Bristol has the highest rates of general crime, with 106 crimes per 1,000 residents, followed by West Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear and West Midlands. Those rates correlate with high levels of tool theft. The persistent threat of crime means that, for 68% of tradespeople, worrying about such theft is a daily reality. The new clause would not only ensure that victims are properly compensated, but send a strong message to offenders that equipment theft is not a low-risk crime. For many tradespeople, a single incident can lead to thousands of pounds in losses and days or weeks of missed work. The clause reflects a growing recognition that crimes affecting livelihoods must be met with penalties that match the seriousness and consequences of the offence. It supports victims, reinforces respect for the law and helps to protect the economic wellbeing of skilled workers across the country.

New clause 96 seeks to amend the Sentencing Act 2020 to make the theft of tools from a tradesman an explicit aggravating factor when courts are considering the seriousness of a theft offence under section 7 of the Theft Act 1968. The intention is to recognise the disproportionate harm caused when essential work tools are stolen from skilled tradespeople, many of whom rely entirely on their tools to earn a living. By requiring courts to treat such thefts more seriously and state that fact in open court, the clause ensures that sentencing properly reflects the real-world impact of those crimes. It improves public confidence in the justice system and sends a clear message that targeting workers in such a way will not be tolerated.

The UK's skilled trade sector is essential to infrastructure, housing and national economic recovery, yet, when they are targeted by thieves, many tradespeople feel unprotected and underserved by the criminal justice system. By introducing this aggravating factor, Parliament would send a clear message that these crimes are taken seriously and that the justice system stands on the side of workers who keep our country running. The provision would also help to restore public confidence in sentencing, ensuring that punishment better reflects the real impact on victims.

New clause 96 would also bring greater consistency and transparency in sentencing by obliging courts to state in open court when a theft is aggravated by the fact that tools were stolen from a tradesman. The system

reinforces public accountability and the principle that sentencing should consider not only the value of items stolen, but the importance to the victim's life and work.

New clause 98 addresses a growing concern about the sale of stolen tradespeople's tools at car boot sales and other temporary markets. Requiring local councils or trading standards authorities to implement an enforcement plan would ensure a more proactive and consistent approach to tackling the issue. Car boot sales and temporary markets, although important parts of local economies and communities, have become a common outlet for the sale of stolen tradesmen's tools. These informal settings often have minimal regulatory oversight, making them attractive to criminals seeking to quickly offload high value items. Requiring councils to create enforcement plans would close this enforcement gap, helping to dismantle a key part of the stolen goods supply chain.

Tradespeople, many of whom are self-employed, are among those most affected by tool theft. Their tools are not just possessions; they are the means by which individuals earn a living. Stolen tools being resold at car boot sales with little oversight reinforces the cycle of crime and undermines legitimate business. A local enforcement plan will support hard-working tradespeople by increasing the risk for those attempting to profit from their misfortune.

Any Member who has taken the time to speak to affected tradespeople will have heard their overwhelming frustration at the lack of the lack of action at car boot sales, watching tools stolen from them being sold in front of their face in broad daylight with no action from the agencies. This new clause seeks to put that right. By requiring councils to plan enforcement at temporary markets, it would encourage more responsible behaviour among market organisers and set a baseline for due diligence, including vendor checks, co-operation with law enforcement and public awareness initiatives. Such expectations could help to preserve the integrity and trustworthiness of community markets without disrupting legitimate trade.

This is a common-sense, low-cost policy that leverages existing local authority structures. Many councils already have trading standards and enforcement teams in place able to take this on. This measure simply ensures that they will turn their attention to this persistent and growing problem. Enforcement plans could include scheduled inspections, information sharing with police and targeted education for both vendors and shoppers. This preventive approach could reduce the frequency of thefts by making it more difficult for criminals to profit.

The Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 set an important precedent in efforts to crack down on the theft of high-value tools and equipment. However, legislation is only effective when matched by local enforcement. This clause bridges the gap between law and local action, giving councils a clear duty and direction to enforce the law where the illicit trade is happening on the ground.

Local residents and small business owners often feel powerless in the face of persistent tool theft. Seeing their local councils take meaningful and visible action, such as regular enforcement of markets, could help to build trust in the system, sending a message that this type of crime is taken seriously and that steps are being taken at every level to protect those most vulnerable to its effect.

The new clause would help deter the resale of stolen goods, protect legitimate tradespeople from further victimisation and send a clear message that theft and resale will be actively policed at all levels. This targeted local action complements broader sentencing reforms and supports efforts to reduce tool theft across the UK.

New clause 32 seeks to amend the Sentencing Act 2020 and specifically targets the growing issue of rural crime by making the theft of high-value farming equipment a statutory aggravating factor in sentencing decisions. Under the proposed provision, when a court is considering the seriousness of a theft offence under section 7 of the Theft Act 1968, and the theft involves farming machinery or tools valued at £10,000 or more, it must treat the value and nature of the stolen property as an aggravating factor.

The theft of high-value farm equipment has a profound and often devastating impact on rural communities and agricultural businesses. These machines, such as tractors, GPS systems, harvesters and other specialised tools, are not only expensive to replace, but also critical to daily operations. When they are stolen, the immediate financial loss can exceed £10,000, but the broader consequences go much further. Farmers face significant disruption to their work, delayed harvesting or planting and reduced productivity, which can affect the entire food supply chain.

Many rural businesses operate on tight margins and such thefts can push them into financial instability or force them to cease operations temporarily. Beyond economics, these crimes erode confidence in rural policing and leave victims feeling vulnerable and targeted, especially in remote areas where support and security may already be limited.

The new clause would also require courts to explicitly state in open court that the offence has been aggravated by this factor. The intent is to reflect the serious disruption and financial harm caused by the theft of vital agricultural machinery such as tractors, GPS units or harvesters, which are essential for productivity and food security in rural communities. By making that an aggravating factor, the new clause aims to ensure that sentencing reflects the full impact on victims and serves as a more effective deterrent. I hope that the Government will consider backing our farmers and backing this new clause.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) has undertaken a significant amount of work to help tackle tool and equipment theft, including the introduction of the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 as a private Member's Bill, to address the escalating issue of equipment and tool theft affecting tradespeople, farmers and rural businesses across England and Wales.

The 2023 Act empowers the Secretary of State to mandate that all new all-terrain vehicles such as quad bikes come equipped with immobilisers and forensic marking before sale. The measures aim to make stolen equipment less attractive to thieves and easier to trace. The Act could make a real and meaningful difference to the issues we are debating here. It received Royal Assent and is designed to deter theft and facilitate the recovery

[Matt Vickers]

of stolen equipment. I would be grateful if the Minister could comment on the progress of enacting the measures set out in that Act.

Alex Davies-Jones: I would be happy to do so, but first I must say how grateful I am to the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset and to the hon. Member for Stockton West for setting out the rationale behind these new clauses.

New clause 13 seeks to extend the scope of the 2023 Act to include the theft of GPS equipment. Such equipment is often used in agricultural and commercial settings. We know the significant impact of thefts of agricultural machinery, in particular all-terrain vehicles, on individuals and businesses in rural areas, and the disruption to essential farming when these thefts occur. That is why we are committed to implementing the 2023 Act to help prevent the theft and resale of high-value equipment. We intend to introduce the necessary secondary legislation later this year, and we will be publishing the Government's response to the call for evidence soon to confirm the scope of that legislation.

2.30 pm

Thefts of removable GPS units are increasing. According to the NFU Mutual crime report from 2024, the cost of GPS thefts soared by 137% in 2023 to an estimated £4.2 million. Those devices are vital for farming and there is scope for them to be included in this legislation. We will continue to engage with those whom this legislation is intended to protect, and who hold the knowledge and expertise required to ensure that we get the details right for the secondary legislation later this year.

To complement the provisions in the 2023 Act, we have already debated the provisions in clause 93, which confer new powers for the police to enter and search premises to recover electronically stolen goods. While it is likely that that power will be used mostly in connection with mobile phones, it will be available for police to use in connection with farm equipment and vehicles fitted with GPS tracking. The new powers will also provide a valuable tool for police in tackling stolen equipment and machinery, including those used by the agricultural sector.

Turning to new clause 27, we also believe that existing sentencing powers for offences under the 2023 Act are sufficient. Courts already have the power to impose fines up to an unlimited amount, and therefore already go beyond the changes proposed in this new clause. Requiring courts to impose fines of specific amounts would also deviate from the current sentencing framework; courts must, alongside the seriousness of the offence, consider the means of the offender when imposing a fine. That is to ensure that the fine is fair and poses an equal burden on the offenders, regardless of their income.

Courts are also required by law to consider compensation orders in all cases involving personal injury, loss or damage. The value of a compensation order, which has no maximum limit if imposed on an adult offender, will be determined based on any evidence provided and the means of the offender, to strike a balance between seeking reparation and not imposing debts that are unrealistic and unenforceable. The independent sentencing review led by David Gauke is also reviewing the sentencing framework, including on financial penalties, and we look forward to its recommendations shortly.

New clauses 32 and 96 seek to make the theft of high-value farming equipment and tools from tradesmen statutory aggravating factors. The Government are well aware of the devastating impact of rural crime and its consequences for our countryside, communities and the wider agricultural sector. We are committed to tackling rural crime and safeguarding rural areas to clamp down on the theft of agricultural equipment.

As I stated earlier, we have committed to the implementation of the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act and to tackling the theft and resale of high-value equipment, particularly for use in an agricultural setting. With that in mind, while I am sympathetic to the sentiment behind the new clauses tabled by the hon. Member for Stockton West, in practice they are not necessary and there is nothing preventing the courts from recognising the impact of these offences now.

This Government are also aware that theft of trade tools from vehicles can be a truly distressing crime, and of course we recognise the negative impacts that such crimes have had on individuals, businesses and industries. I pay tribute to my good and hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Amanda Martin), for all her incredible and diligent work in raising awareness of this issue and supporting our tradespeople, the backbone of our economy, across the UK.

Action is being taken on vehicle crime through the National Vehicle Crime Working Group, which has established a network of vehicle crime specialists, involving every police force in England and Wales, to ensure that the forces can share information about emerging trends in vehicle crime and better tackle those regional issues directly. When deciding what sentence to impose, courts must consider the circumstances of the case, including the offender's culpability, the harm they caused or intended to cause, and any aggravating and mitigating factors. The courts also have a statutory duty to follow any relevant sentencing guidelines developed by the Independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales, unless the court is satisfied that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so.

On new clause 32, there are existing aggravating factors that could apply in these types of cases, such as where there is a high level of profit from the offence. The guidelines also state that, for property offences, if the property is highly valuable to the victim or causes significant loss such as serious disruption to their life, business or livelihood, that could be considered a factor indicating a more serious degree of harm, which might lead to an increased sentence. In cases involving personal injury, loss or damage resulting from offence, courts must also consider whether to impose a compensation order to require offenders to make financial reparation to victims. Where no such order is made, they must give a reason why.

In response to proposed new clause 96, I note that the sentencing guideline for theft is clear that where the offence is of a sophisticated nature, or involves significant planning, the culpability of the offender should be higher. The theft guideline also already makes clear that, when assessing the level of harm, courts must consider the consequential financial harm to victims and others, the impact of theft on a business and the

emotional distress caused. That, along with the assessment of culpability under the guideline, determines the starting point for the sentence. The fact that an offence has been committed over a sustained period of time is part of the non-exhaustive list of aggravating factors.

As I hope hon. Members will appreciate, the existing framework and guidelines for theft robustly set out the crucial factors that courts should consider in determining the seriousness of each and every theft offence, including theft of tools from tradesmen and theft of high-value farming equipment.

Luke Taylor: The premise of the Minister's point is effectively that sufficient legislation is already in place to combat these crimes. The response to an freedom of information request that I submitted to the Met police showed that in London, in the last five years, nine in 10 tool thefts went unsolved. The fact that that failure has been allowed to continue under the existing legislation suggests that legislation is not sufficient. I support the proposed new clauses because something needs to change to stop these incredibly damaging crimes, which are affecting not just the livelihoods, but the mental health of our valuable, essential tradespeople and their families.

Alex Davies-Jones: I welcome that comment from the Liberal Democrat spokesperson. I and this Government recognise that theft is a crime, and that victims are immensely impacted by it—we heard earlier about the hon. Member's own circumstances—but the legislation is adequate. As I have already said, we have robust legislation to tackle these crimes. What has been apparent over the last 14 years is a decimation of our public services, including our policing, which has meant that police do not have the resources that they need to investigate these crimes effectively. I am glad to say that this Government are changing that by recruiting and funding more police officers, including for the Met police, to ensure that we have the police to go after these criminals.

Luke Taylor: The Minister has set me up nicely with that point, and I will come back to it later. The Met police are going to reduce their staff—including officers and police community support officers—by 1,700 next year. The Government are attempting to present a case that the legislation is sufficient at present, and that they are providing more officers and resources to police forces to combat the increase in these crimes. Whoever's fault it was—and we all make points about the cause, the cuts, when the cuts started, and what conditions were prior to them—if the Met police will suffer the loss of 1,700 officers next year due to the funding situation, and the legislation is currently letting down tradespeople, I would gently push back that either the measures in the legislation or the resources are insufficient to solve an issue that we all generally agree exists today.

Alex Davies-Jones: The Policing Minister assures me that that figure for the number of cuts being made by the Met police is not correct. We are happy to debate that. I and this Government are still sufficiently certain that the legislation is robust in this area. We can debate the means that we have to tackle that but, as I have stated, this Government are funding more police resources to ensure that those who commit these crimes are being sought. In an earlier sitting of the Committee, we debated why it is so important to clarify and get right provisions for shop theft, so that the police have adequate equipment and resources to go after the perpetrators. These thefts are illegal but, for whatever reason, the crimes are not being pursued. We are determined to ensure, through our safer streets mission, that that problem is tackled, but the legislation that we have in place is robust.

Regarding the courts and the justice system, the Government do consider that the courts are already considering the impacts of such crimes when sentencing. The addition of the measures in the proposed new clauses would add unnecessary complications to the sentencing framework. Moreover, sentencing in individual cases should as far as possible be at the discretion of our independent judiciary, to ensure that sentences are fair, impartial and proportionate.

Finally, as I have already set out, any changes to the sentencing framework should take into account the sentencing review's recommendations, which are due to be published shortly.

On new clause 98, I understand the frustration that many individuals feel when they see stolen equipment being sold at car boot sales and other informal markets. I reassure the shadow Minister that the Government take this issue seriously. However, we cannot support the clause in the absence of further policy work and engagement with relevant authorities to explore the best way to ensure that stolen equipment is not sold in informal market settings or at car boot sales.

Overall, I am sympathetic to the spirit of the new clauses, but I do not believe them to be necessary at this time. I reassure the Committee that this Government are fully committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 to tackle the theft and resale of equipment.

Matt Vickers: Can I take it that there is a commitment to doing something to clamp down on the situation with temporary markets and car boot sales? Also, will the Minister meet with Shoaib Awan, the gas fitter who has been campaigning on the issue, to discuss what that might look like and to hear the sector's frustrations?

Alex Davies-Jones: Yes, we are happy to meet with Shoaib Awan to discuss this, and yes, we have a commitment to looking at the situation more widely and at the issue directly. As someone who loves a car boot sale, I am keen to explore the question further.

I ask the shadow Minister to be patient for a little while longer as we finalise our plans for the implementation of the 2023 Act, and as we look into the issues in more detail to get the policy work right. On that basis, I ask hon. Members not to press their new clauses.

Anna Sabine: I seek a quick clarification from the Minister. Was she saying that under the plans to implement the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act, there may be scope within some secondary legislation to look at GPS thefts specifically? Did I understand that correctly?

Alex Davies-Jones: Yes.

Luke Taylor: I rise to speak in support of new clause 13, as well as Conservative new clauses 27, 96 and 98. We had a long discussion on this issue, but it is worth

[Luke Taylor]

repeating as often as possible that tool theft is a devastating crime that cost tradespeople more than £94 million last year.

Research from NFU Mutual shows that one in three tradespeople now live in constant fear of violent thieves. Some have been attacked with crowbars and other weapons just for trying to protect their tools from being ripped out of their vans. At the February rally in Parliament Square organised by Trades United, I heard from campaigners about tradespeople not letting their vehicles out of their sight, and about thieves cutting off the roofs of their vans to steal tools. It was heartbreaking. We hear about the impact on those tradespeople and their families, including suicides and mental health problems.

Despite the back and forth, I think we should make it absolutely clear that this issue needs to be addressed, and that powers must be given to the police and courts to treat it with the seriousness that it deserves. Tool theft is more than just standard assault or theft; it is an assault on tradespeople's hard work and their livelihoods. It is time to acknowledge that danger to their entire livelihoods and lifestyles.

Anna Sabine: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 14

RURAL CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY

"(1) A day after this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must establish a rural crime prevention task force to develop proposals for tackling rural crime.

(2) The task force should be tasked with a remit that includes, but is not confined to, examining—

(a) The particular types of crime that occur in rural areas;

(b) Crime rates in rural communities across England and Wales;

(c) The current levels of police resources and funding in rural communities;

(d) Whether specific training in how to respond to rural crime call-outs should be undertaken by police control room operators;

(e) The operational case, and the funding implications, of appointing rural crime specialists in Police Forces across England and Wales which serve areas that include a significant rural population; and

(f) Whether a National Rural Crime Coordinator should be established.

(3) The task force established under subsection (1) must submit a rural crime prevention strategy to the Secretary of State within six months of its appointment.

(4) The Secretary of State must, within a month of receiving the report made by the task force, lay before both Houses of Parliament a written response to the task force's recommendations.

(5) The Secretary of State must, within a month of laying their response to the task force's report, ensure that an amendable motion on the subject of the rural crime task force's recommendations is laid, and moved, before both Houses of Parliament."—*(Anna Sabine.)*

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to establish a task force to produce a strategy for tackling rural crime, makes provision for specific aspects of the task force's remit, and requires the Secretary of State to bring forward a substantive motion before both Houses of Parliament on the task force's recommendations.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.45 pm

Anna Sabine: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause would require the Secretary of State to establish a rural crime taskforce, which is a long overdue step in recognising and addressing the growing threat of rural crime across England and Wales. In 2023 alone, the total cost of rural crime surged to a staggering £52.8 million—a 22% increase since 2020. Behind that figure lie the lives and livelihoods of farmers, landowners and rural communities who are increasingly under siege from organised criminal gangs. These are not petty thefts, but targeted cross-border operations involving the theft of high-value machinery, vehicles and GPS units, often facilitated by networks that are deliberately structured to evade detection by working across multiple police force boundaries. I have spoken to my many farmers in my constituency of Frome and East Somerset, and many of these rural crimes end in terrifying physical altercations between farmers and criminals, and even threats being made against farmers' families.

Yet, while the threat has grown, the policing response has not. Fewer than 1% of officers in England and Wales are dedicated to rural crime. Many forces lack even the basic tools, such as drone kits and mobile automatic number plate recognition cameras, to respond effectively. It is no wonder that 49% of rural residents feel that police do not take rural crime seriously, and two thirds believe reporting it is a waste of time. This new clause would change that. It mandates the creation of a taskforce with a clear and comprehensive remit to assess crime levels, review police resources, consider rural-specific training, explore the case for rural crime specialists and evaluate whether a national rural crime co-ordinator should be established.

Importantly, the new clause is not just about a report gathering dust. It requires the Secretary of State to respond to the taskforce's strategy in writing, and to bring an amendable motion before both Houses. That would ensure that Parliament is not just informed, but actively involved in shaping the solution to rural crime. Rural crime is not a niche issue; it is a national issue. Rural communities deserve to know that they are seen, heard and protected by the laws of this land. The taskforce is not a symbolic gesture; it is a practical, focused and long overdue step towards restoring confidence, strengthening policing and securing justice for rural Britain.

Matt Vickers: Rural communities deserve the same protection, visibility and voice as those in urban areas, yet too often rural crime goes under-reported, under-resourced and underestimated. From equipment theft and fly-tipping to wildlife crime and antisocial behaviour, the challenges facing rural areas are distinct and growing. Having rural crime recognised in police structures and developing a specific taskforce could send a strong signal that rural communities matter, that their concerns are heard and that they will not be left behind when it comes to public safety.

However, although the new clause is clearly well-intentioned I would like to put some operational questions to those who tabled it, to ensure greater clarity. What assessment has been made of the additional resources that police forces might need to implement such a

strategy effectively, particularly in already stretched rural areas? The new clause refers to the creation of new roles. The National Police Chiefs' Council already has a rural crime lead and many police forces across the country already appoint rural crime co-ordinators. How would the suggested additional roles be different?

How does the new clause balance the need for a national strategy with the operational independence and local decision making of police and crime commissioners? Is there a clear definition of what constitutes a rural area for the purposes of this strategy? How will this be applied consistently across the country? I am interested to hear the answers, but would be minded to support the new clause if it was pressed to a Division.

Dame Diana Johnson: As the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset set out, new clause 14 would require the Government to establish a rural crime prevention taskforce. Let me first say that the Government take the issue of rural crime extremely seriously, and that rural communities matter. I want to outline some of the work going on in this area.

I take the opportunity to acknowledge the vital role that the national rural crime unit and the national wildlife crime unit play in tackling crimes affecting our rural areas, as well as helping police across the UK to tackle organised theft and disrupt serious and organised crime. Those units have delivered a range of incredible successes. The national rural crime unit co-ordinated the operational response of several forces to the theft of GPS units across the UK, which resulted in multiple arrests and the disruption of two organised crime groups. The unit has recovered over £10 million in stolen property, including agricultural machinery and vehicles, in the past 18 months alone.

The national wildlife crime unit helped disrupt nine organised crime groups, with a further nine archived as no longer active, as well as assisting in the recovery of £4.2 million in financial penalties. It also oversees the police national response to hare coursing, which has resulted in a 40% reduction in offences.

I am delighted to say that the national rural crime unit and the national wildlife crime unit will, combined, receive over £800,000 in Home Office funding this financial year to continue their work tackling rural and wildlife crime, which can pose a unique challenge for policing given the scale and isolation of rural areas. The funding for the national rural crime unit will enable it to continue to increase collaboration across police forces and harness the latest technology and data to target the serious organised crime groups involved in crimes such as equipment theft from farms. The national wildlife crime unit will strengthen its ability to disrupt criminal networks exploiting endangered species both in the UK and internationally with enhanced data analysis and financial investigation, helping the unit to track illegal wildlife profits and to ensure that offenders face justice.

The funding comes as we work together with the National Police Chiefs' Council to deliver the new NPCC-led rural and wildlife crime strategy to ensure that the entire weight of Government is put behind tackling rural crime. That new strategy is expected to be launched by the summer. We want to ensure that the Government's safer streets mission benefits everyone, no matter where they live, including those in rural communities. This joined-up approach between the Home Office, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and policing, as well as the confirmed funding for the national rural crime unit and the national wildlife crime unit, will help to ensure that the weight of Government is put behind tackling rural crimes such as the theft of high-value farm equipment, fly-tipping and livestock theft.

Given the work already ongoing in this area, I believe that the Liberal Democrat new clause is unnecessary, and I urge the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset to withdraw it.

Anna Sabine: I want to come back on some of the questions asked by the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Stockton West. He asked about the resources that would be required to implement the strategy. Having spoken to the rural police force in my area, my understanding is that the issue is not necessarily one of rural officers being under-resourced, although more resource clearly would be helpful; it is actually to do with how those officers are allocated. For example, in Frome we have a rural crime team, but because of a lack of neighbourhood policing, if there is an incident in Frome on an evening—a fight outside a pub, for example—rural officers are deployed to go and deal with that rather than fighting rural crime. One of the challenges for those officers is that they are not actually allowed to do the job they are trained for, because they are covering for other areas.

The hon. Gentleman asked why the strategy was necessary when we already have various regional rural crime leads. The reason is that we need to ensure that rural crime is seen to be significant nationally—we need to have a national push and develop some strategies to tackle it. I welcome what the Minister said about that.

The shadow Minister's third question was about defining rural areas. We are quite good at defining them now, so I am not sure why we could not continue to define rural crime areas in the way that constabularies do currently, but we could look at that.

I welcome the Minister's comments on what is clearly a growing Government drive to take rural crime seriously. I do not doubt any of her figures about the reduction of crimes such as hare coursing. All I would say is that farmers in my constituency are really not reporting crimes, and I worry that crime figures are dropping simply because crime is not being reported, not because it is not occurring. The longer rural crime is not taken seriously, the more those numbers will drop.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 9.

Division No. 21]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Sabine, Anna
Rankin, Jack	Taylor, Luke
Robertson, Joe	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 15

Neighbourhood Policing: minimum levels

"(1) Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament proposals on maintaining minimum levels of neighbourhood policing.

(2) The proposals must include—

(a) A requirement for every Police Force in England and Wales to maintain neighbourhood policing teams at a level necessary to ensure effective community engagement and crime prevention;

(b) A plan to designate a proportion of funds, recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, for neighbourhood policing initiatives; and

(c) A plan for future Police Grant Reports to include a ring-fenced allocation of 20% of total funds to be allocated specifically for neighbourhood policing."—*(Anna Sabine.)*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Anna Sabine: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 16—*Neighbourhood Policing*—

"(1) The Secretary of State must ensure that every local authority area in England and Wales has a neighbourhood policing team must be assigned exclusively to community-based duties, including:

(a) High-visibility foot patrols;

(b) Community engagement and intelligence gathering;

(c) Crime prevention initiatives; and

(d) Solving crime.

(2) The Home Office must publish proposals detailing the additional funding that will be required to ensure that police forces can meet these requirements without reducing officer numbers in other frontline policing roles.

(3) The Secretary of State must publish an annual report detailing:

(a) The number of officers and PCSOs deployed in neighbourhood policing roles;

(b) The total cost of maintaining the required levels; and

(c) The impact on crime reduction and public confidence in policing.

(4) If a police force fails to meet the minimum staffing levels required under subsection (1), the Home Office must intervene and provide emergency funding to ensure compliance within six months."

Anna Sabine: New clauses 15 and 16 are vital in ensuring robust neighbourhood policing across England and Wales. New clause 15 mandates the Government to publish proposals within six months to maintain neighbourhood policing teams at levels necessary for effective community engagement and crime prevention. That includes designating a proportion of funds recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 for neighbourhood policing initiatives and ringfencing 20% of total funds in future police grant reports specifically for neighbourhood policing.

New clause 16 would require the Government to ensure that every local authority area has a dedicated neighbourhood policing team assigned exclusively to community-based duties such as high-visibility foot patrols, community engagement, crime prevention initiatives and solving crime. The Home Office must also publish proposals detailing the additional funding needed to meet these requirements without reducing officer numbers in other frontline roles.

The rationale for the new clauses is clear. Home Office figures reveal that the number of neighbourhood police officers in England and Wales as of March 2024 was 20% lower than previously thought. Across the country, there were 6,210 fewer neighbourhood police officers than earlier official figures suggested. In my constituency of Frome and East Somerset the situation is particularly concerning. The latest data shows that crime rates have been rising, with 269 crimes reported in Frome in March 2024 alone. That highlights the urgent need for more neighbourhood police officers to ensure community safety and effective crime prevention. Furthermore, the number of PCSOs has been drastically reduced, with 235 taken off the streets of England and Wales in just one year. My local force, Avon and Somerset, saw PCSO numbers fall from 315 to 255 since September '23—a loss of nearly 20% and the biggest in any force in England.

The new clauses are essential for reversing those trends and restoring public confidence in our policing. By ensuring minimum levels of neighbourhood policing and dedicated community-based duties, we can enhance public safety, improve community relations and effectively tackle crime. I urge my fellow members of the Committee to support new clauses 15 and 16. Let us take decisive action to strengthen neighbourhood policing and ensure that every community in England and Wales is adequately protected.

Matt Vickers: Neighbourhood policing is the foundation of public trust in our police forces. When officers are visible, engaged and embedded in the communities they serve, crime is deterred, information flows more freely and residents feel safer and more connected. New clause 15 recognises the role of neighbourhood policing in preventing crime and promoting community confidence. Having officers who know the patch and who are known by local residents is invaluable in early intervention, tackling antisocial behaviour and protecting the vulnerable.

I should be grateful for further comments and clarity on how new clauses 15 and 16 will ensure that forces and directly elected police commissioners will have the flexibility to deploy resources based on local need, rather than being constrained by rigid top-down targets. What criteria or metrics will be used to define whether neighbourhood policing levels are sufficient to ensure effective community engagement and crime prevention, and who decides what is effective? Further to that, what role will local communities have under this proposal in shaping what neighbourhood policing will look like in their area?

Luke Taylor: This year, the Met police will cut more than 1,700 officers, PCSOs and staff. I invite the Minister to intervene and correct me on that if necessary, as it would seem to suggest that there was an error in the figure given earlier. A correction cometh not.

That figure will include the loss of the parks police team and of officers placed in schools, who have been so critical in maintaining early intervention in those settings and diverting young people away from a life of crime. They have also improved relationships between young people and the police, ensuring that young people

can trust the police when they have information that might lead to crimes being prevented or solved. Those officers are dearly needed today.

The £260 million shortfall below the required budget in London will also create a 10% cut to the forensics teams, which includes the investigation of offences such as tool theft, sexual offences and many other crimes. There will be an 11% cut to historic crime teams and a 25% cut to mounted police, who police festivals, sporting events and the protests we see happening so much more regularly in central London. There will also be a 7% cut to the dog teams that provide support to officers going into dangerous and challenging situations, leaving them unsupported and potentially at risk. There will also be reduced front counter operating hours, and there are even hints about taking firearms off the flying squad.

One might ask, "Why are these cuts relevant to this new clause?" The cuts throughout the Met police will inevitably lead to more abstractions from outer London police forces. In particular, the cuts to mounted police and dog teams will pull officers from outer London, including from Sutton and Cheam, which will leave our high streets less safe, our residents more fearful of being victims of crime and more crimes going unsolved.

That demonstrates the absolute necessity of community policing, as well as the need for guarantees to be put in place so that those cuts do not happen, which will affect my residents and residents across London. New clause 16 would also require an annual report that would give clear and transparent information on officer numbers, PCSO numbers, costs and the real-world impact on crime and public confidence. I urge Members to support this new clause.

3 pm

Dame Diana Johnson: I will respond directly to the points that have just been made about the Metropolitan police. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Metropolitan police are the best-funded part of policing in England and Wales. They constitute around 25% of policing, and this year they are receiving up to £3.8 billion to provide policing in London—it is worth reflecting on that. They have also received, as has every other police force, additional money to fund neighbourhood policing. I have had reassurance from the Met that the money will actually go into neighbourhood policing, which I think is worth saying.

While I fully appreciate what the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam is concerned about for his constituents, it has to be made clear that we have just come out of 14 years, many of which were years of austerity. I do not wish to labour the point, but the hon. Gentleman's party was involved in the first five years of austerity, when cuts to the public services were most acute and severe. We are now at the end of that period and this Labour Government are trying to put money back into policing. I have been very clear that more money is going into the Metropolitan police and into every other police force, to build up neighbourhood policing in particular. A little bit of humility on the part of the Liberal Democrats might be helpful.

Luke Taylor: Again, I invite the Minister to respond to the specific point about the 1,700 fewer officers in London. Whatever the circumstances, people today are concerned about crime, including tool theft and sexual offences. We can argue back and forth about the note from the right hon. Member for Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North (Liam Byrne), which said that there was no money left, about austerity or about how long memories go back. If there are to be cuts to the number officers next year in my constituency of Sutton and Cheam, and across London, let us address the issues at hand about how we mitigate the impact on our residents tomorrow.

Dame Diana Johnson: I hear the hon. Gentleman's point loud and clear. All members of this Committee are concerned about crime and want to ensure that crime goes down, that victims are supported and that the police are properly funded. We can probably all agree on that in this Committee. On the particular point about the Metropolitan police, I dispute the numbers that he has given. He is right that there will be a loss of PCSOs and police officers in '24-25, but my understanding is that it is around 1,000, not 1,700. Subject to what happens in the spending review, we will have to look at what happens in future years.

The Metropolitan police have not had the necessary funding for years, which is why they are having to make some really tough decisions. Nobody wants to see a reduction in police officer numbers—I certainly do not, as the Policing Minister. The Home Secretary and I are working to do everything that we can to support police forces and not see reductions in PCSOs and police officers.

New clauses 15 and 16 seek to legislate for minimum levels of neighbourhood policing. I certainly agree with what the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset said about the need to address the lamentable decline in neighbourhood policing since 2010, which we can all see, but legislating in the way that she proposes is unnecessarily prescriptive and risks imposing a straitjacket on the Home Office, police and crime commissioners and chief officers.

The Government are already delivering on our commitment to restore neighbourhood policing. We have already announced that police forces will be supported to deliver a 13,000 increase in neighbourhood policing by the end of this Parliament. By April '26, there will be 3,000 more officers and PCSOs working in neighbourhood policing than there are today. This is backed up by an additional £200 million in the current financial year, as part of the total funding for police forces of £17.6 billion, which is an increase of £1.2 billion compared with the '24-25 police funding settlement.

Additionally, the neighbourhood policing guarantee announced by the Prime Minister on 10 April sets out our wider commitment to the public. As part of that guarantee, every neighbourhood in England and Wales will have dedicated teams spending their time on the beat, with guaranteed police patrols in town centres and other hotspot areas at peak times, such as a Friday and Saturday night. Communities will also have a named, contactable officer to tackle the issues facing their communities. There will be a dedicated antisocial behaviour lead in every force, working with residents and businesses to develop tailored action plans to tackle antisocial behaviour, which we all know has blighted communities.

Those measures will be in place from July this year, in addition to the new neighbourhood officers, whom I have already mentioned, who will all be in their roles by

[Dame Diana Johnson]

next April. Finally, through the Government's new police standards and performance improvement unit, we will ensure that police performance is consistently and accurately measured. The work of the unit will reinforce our commitment to transparency through the regular reporting of workforce data and the annual police grant report.

I wholeheartedly support the sentiment behind the new clauses. We absolutely need to bolster neighbourhood policing, reverse the cuts and set clear minimum standards of policing in local communities. Working closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council, the policing inspectorate, the College of Policing and others, we have the levers to do that. Although the new clauses are well intentioned, I do not believe that they are necessary, so I invite the hon. Member to withdraw the motion.

Anna Sabine: The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Stockton West, made a couple of points. The first related to who would set the levels of neighbourhood policing under the new clause. Our proposal is that it would be the Home Office, in discussion with local police forces and local councils—the people who know their area best. I can easily see that there would be a way of doing community engagement through councils as part of that discussion, which is another point that he made.

Of course it is important for local police and crime commissioners to have flexibility, but there is a problem with the lack of structure around the numbers for neighbourhood policing. In my constituency, if a big issue, event or activity happens in Bristol, a lot of the local police get taken off there, and we lose our neighbourhood policing. It is similar point to the one that was made earlier.

I welcome the Minister's response, which was thoughtful as always, and I appreciate the commitment that the Government are making to neighbourhood policing. I hear all of that, but we will still press both new clauses in the group to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2, Noes 9.

Division No. 22]

AYES

Sabine, Anna	Taylor, Luke

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 16

NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING

"(1) The Secretary of State must ensure that every local authority area in England and Wales has a neighbourhood policing team must be assigned exclusively to community-based duties, including:

(a) High-visibility foot patrols;

(b) Community engagement and intelligence gathering;

(c) Crime prevention initiatives; and

(d) Solving crime.

(2) The Home Office must publish proposals detailing the additional funding that will be required to ensure that police forces can meet these requirements without reducing officer numbers in other frontline policing roles.

(3) The Secretary of State must publish an annual report detailing:

(a) The number of officers and PCSOs deployed in neighbourhood policing roles;

(b) The total cost of maintaining the required levels; and

(c) The impact on crime reduction and public confidence in policing.

(4) If a police force fails to meet the minimum staffing levels required under subsection (1), the Home Office must intervene and provide emergency funding to ensure compliance within six months."*—(Anna Sabine.)*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2, Noes 9.

Division No. 23]

AYES

Sabine, Anna	Taylor, Luke

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 17

OFFENCE OF FAILING TO MEET POLLUTION PERFORMANCE COMMITMENT LEVELS

"(1) A water or water and sewerage company ('C') commits an offence where C has—

(a) failed to meet its pollution performance commitment level for three consecutive years; or

(b) experienced an increase in—

(i) total pollution incidents per 10,000km2, or

(ii) serious pollution incidents

for three consecutive years.

(2) For the purposes of this section—

(a) 'water or water and sewerage company' means companies which are responsible for the provision of water, or water and sewerage, services and which are regulated by Ofwat and the Environment Agency;

(b) 'pollution performance commitment level' means the level of performance on pollution that the company has committed to deliver, and which is reported against by Ofwat in its annual water company performance report; and

(c) 'total pollution incidents per 10,000km2' and

'serious pollution incidents' mean the relevant figures under those headings reported by the Environment Agency in its annual environmental performance report.

(3) If guilty of an offence under this section, C is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine."—*(Anna Sabine.)*

This new clause creates an offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Anna Sabine: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 18—*Senior manager liability for failure to meet pollution performance commitment levels*—

"(1) A person ('P') commits an offence where—

(a) P is a senior manager of a water or water and sewerage company ('C'),

(b) C commits an offence under section [*Offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels*], and

(c) P has failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent that offence being committed by C.

(2) For the purposes of this section—

'senior manager' means an individual who plays a significant role in—

(a) the making of decisions about how C's relevant activities are to be managed or organised, or

(b) the actual managing or organising of C's relevant activities;

'water or water and sewerage company' has the meaning given in section [*Offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels*].

(3) Where P is charged with an offence under this section, it is a defence for P to show that P was a senior manager of C for such a short time during the relevant period that P could not reasonably have been expected to take steps to prevent that offence being committed by C.

(4) Where P is guilty of an offence under this section, P is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine."

This new clause creates senior manager liability for failure to meet pollution performance commitment levels.

Anna Sabine: New clause 17 addresses the critical issue of pollution performance by water and sewerage companies, and is essential to ensuring accountability and protecting our environment. The new clause would make it an offence for a water or sewerage company to fail to meet its pollution performance commitment levels for three consecutive years. It would also be an offence if the company experiences an increase in total pollution incidents per 10,000 sq km or serious pollution incidents for three consecutive years.

In my constituency, there are two amazing local groups, Friends of the River Frome and Frome Families for the Future, that monitor pollution levels and encourage the community to get engaged in their river. However, like many other groups across the country, they are working in a context of insufficient regulation. The new clause is designed to hold companies accountable for their environmental impact. By imposing fines on those who fail to meet these standards, we would send a clear message that pollution and environmental negligence will not be tolerated. Supporting the new clause means safeguarding our natural resources and ensuring that companies take their environmental responsibilities seriously.

New clause 18 addresses the critical issue of senior manager liability for failure to meet pollution performance commitment levels. It would make it an offence for the senior managers of water and sewerage companies to fail to take all reasonable steps to prevent their companies from committing pollution offences. By holding senior managers accountable, we ensure that those in positions of power are responsible for the environmental impact of their decisions. The data is clear: last year, sewage was pumped into waterways for more than 3.6 million hours. That is unacceptable, and highlights the urgent need for stronger enforcement and accountability.

Supporting these clauses means taking a firm stand against environmental negligence and ensuring that our water companies are managed responsibly. I commend them to the Committee.

Matt Vickers: No one disputes the need for stronger accountability on water pollution, but these new clauses take a headline-grabbing, punitive approach that risks being legally unsound, practically unworkable and counterproductive.

The last Conservative Government took decisive action to tackle water pollution, including announcing the "Plan for Water", which outlined a comprehensive strategy to enhance water quality and ensure sustainable water resources across England. This initiative addressed pollution, infrastructure and regulatory challenges through co-ordinated efforts involving Government bodies, regulators, water companies, farmers and the public. The strategy committed to water companies speeding up their infrastructure upgrades, bringing forward £1.6 billion for work to start between '23 and '25. The plan also ensured that fines from water companies would be reinvested into a new water restoration fund—making polluters pay for any damage they cause to the environment.

On new clause 17, why is the threshold three consecutive years? That seems arbitrary. Water companies are already subject to significant civil penalties, enforcement orders and licence reviews by Ofwat and the Environment Agency. Is the clause necessary, or does it simply duplicate existing mechanisms with a more punitive spin? More widely, what evidence is there that these measures will improve water quality outcomes, rather than just increase legal costs and drive defensive behaviour within companies?

3.15 pm

Dame Diana Johnson: I thank the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset for explaining the intention behind new clauses 17 and 18. The Government have been clear that water companies must accelerate action to reduce pollution to the environment. Ofwat, as the independent economic regulator of the water industry, sets water companies' performance commitments, including those on pollution incidents, in the five-yearly price review process.

Where those performance commitments are not met, companies can incur financial penalties, which are returned to customers through lower bills in the next financial year. As a result of underperformance in the 2023-24 financial year, Ofwat is requiring companies to return £165.2 million to customers. Ofwat has just expanded those performance commitments further for the 2025-2030 period to include storm overflow spills and serious

[Dame Diana Johnson]

pollution incidents. That means that the regulator is already punishing water companies for failing to meet their pollution commitments.

Furthermore, the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025, which received Royal Assent earlier this year, significantly strengthens the power of the regulators and delivers on the Government's commitment to put failing water companies in special measures. The Act introduced automatic penalties on polluters, and will ban bonuses for water company executives if they fail to meet adequate standards. Before introducing secondary legislation to implement automatic penalties, the Government will consult on the specific offences that will be in scope, and on the value of the penalties.

On the subject of senior management liability, the Water (Special Measures) Act creates a statutory requirement for all water companies to publish annual pollution incident reduction plans. The plans will require companies to set out clear actions and timelines to meaningfully reduce the frequency and seriousness of pollution incidents. Both the company and the chief executive will be personally liable for ensuring a compliant plan and report is published each year. In addition, measures from the Act, which came into force on 25 April, introduce stricter penalties, including imprisonment, where senior executives in water companies obstruct investigations by the Environment Agency and the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

The new clauses would cut across the recently strengthened regulatory regime, with enhanced penalties for the water companies that fail to live up to their obligations and increased powers for the regulator. Given that, the new clauses are unnecessary; indeed, they would add complexity and uncertainty in the regulatory process. For those reasons, I ask the hon. Member to withdraw the motion.

Anna Sabine: I enjoyed the new clauses being called headline grabbing. They are certainly headline grabbing; the whole issue of sewage in our waters has been massively headline grabbing, because the public feel incredibly strongly that our waterways, and the rivers that we use and want to swim in, should not be full of sewage pumped out by private water companies. I think many members of the public would welcome a slightly more punitive approach than we saw under the last Government.

In terms of being unworkable, I think the new clauses are very practical and measurable—I am not sure in what way they are unworkable. Turning to the Minister's comments, the Lib Dems have said that we welcome many of the directions taken in the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025, but we do not feel it goes far enough. Banning bosses' bonuses is not the same as making them criminally responsible for some of the actions they are taking in terms of environmental negligence. Again, we will press both new clauses in the group to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2, Noes 9.

Division No. 24]

AYES

Sabine, Anna — Taylor, Luke

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex — Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt — Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David — Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex — Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 18

SENIOR MANAGER LIABILITY FOR FAILURE TO MEET POLLUTION PERFORMANCE COMMITMENT LEVELS

"(1) A person ('P') commits an offence where—

(a) P is a senior manager of a water or water and sewerage company ('C'),

(b) C commits an offence under section [Offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels], and

(c) P has failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent that offence being committed by C.

(2) For the purposes of this section—

'senior manager' means an individual who plays a significant role in—

(a) the making of decisions about how C's relevant activities are to be managed or organised, or

(b) the actual managing or organising of C's relevant activities;

'water or water and sewerage company' has the meaning given in section [Offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels].

(3) Where P is charged with an offence under this section, it is a defence for P to show that P was a senior manager of C for such a short time during the relevant period that P could not reasonably have been expected to take steps to prevent that offence being committed by C.

(4) Where P is guilty of an offence under this section, P is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine."—*(Anna Sabine.)*

This new clause creates senior manager liability for failure to meet pollution performance commitment levels.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2, Noes 9.

Division No. 25]

AYES

Sabine, Anna — Taylor, Luke

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex — Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt — Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David — Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex — Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 19

SAFEGUARDS FOR THE USE OF FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY IN PUBLIC SPACES

"(1) The use of live facial recognition technology for real-time biometric identification, by any public or private authorities, shall be prohibited unless one or more of the following conditions are met—

(a) It is used for the purpose of preventing, detecting, or investigating serious crimes as defined under the Serious Crime Act 2007;

(b) The deployment has received prior judicial authorization specifying the scope, duration, and purpose of its use;

(c) It is necessary and proportionate for preventing an imminent and substantial threat to public safety, such as a terrorist attack; and

(d) It is deployed for the purpose of locating missing persons or vulnerable individuals at risk.

(2) Any public authority deploying live facial recognition technology must:

(a) Conduct and publish a Data Protection Impact Assessment before deployment;

(b) Ensure that use is compliant with the principles of necessity and proportionality as outlined in the Human Rights Act 1998;

(c) Maintain clear and publicly available records of deployments, including justification for use and any safeguards implemented;

(d) Inform the public of deployments, unless exceptional circumstances apply; and

(e) Create, implement and follow nationwide statutory guidance for using the technology.

(3) The use of live facial recognition technology for mass surveillance, profiling, or automated decision-making without human oversight, is an offence.

(4) The Information Commissioner's Office and an independent oversight body shall be responsible for monitoring compliance with the provisions of this clause, conducting audits, and investigating complaints.

(5) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must sure that a motion is tabled, and moved, before both Houses of Parliament to approve the appointment of the independent oversight body specified in subsection (4).

(6) A public authority or private entity guilty of an offence under this section will be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine

(7) A private individual found guilty of an offence under this section will be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine or imprisonment (or both).

(8) The Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament an annual report detailing the use of live facial recognition technology, including instances of authorisation and compliance measures undertaken, and ensure that a motion is tabled, and moved, before both Houses to approve the report."

—(Luke Taylor.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Luke Taylor: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

There can be no denying that we are entering a new world with the advent of new technologies that fundamentally reshape the relationship between citizens and the state. There is probably no more vivid an example of that than live facial recognition technology, which is rightly causing great concern among people across London and throughout the UK.

I am, for instance, concerned about the installation of permanent cameras in Croydon, just next door to my community in Sutton and Cheam. In Sutton itself, the use of roaming facial recognition cameras has already caused anxiety among local people, not least the thousands of Hongkongers who call Sutton home, many of whom escaped exactly this kind of potentially abusable surveillance from the Chinese Government, only to find it trying to take root in Britain. That anxiety has often been met with the unfair and often disproven riposte that if someone has done something wrong, they have nothing to worry about.

It is undeniable that without proper safeguards, this technology can be a negative force, through either human malpractice or, perhaps just as worryingly, technological shortcomings. Research from the US has shown that the technology can be racially biased, struggling to distinguish between non-white people, because it was trained on white faces. Research from the Alan Turing Institute has shown that a version of the technology developed by Microsoft has a 0% error rate in identifying white men, but a 21% error rate in identifying dark-skinned women. Those would be worrying facts in their own right, but we are talking about liberty and justice—the two cornerstones of our democracy. We must be very careful about adopting technology that undermines that, and any sensible legislator would want safeguards in place.

Anything that further erodes minority communities' trust in the police must be resisted and avoided. Our neighbours in the EU have done just that, limiting the use of this technology unless it is absolutely necessary for security or rescue, and requiring judicial oversight or an independent administrative authority to facilitate its safe use even in that case. New clause 19 would see us follow our European neighbours in making sure that the technology is deployed only in limited circumstances and with the maximum oversight.

Our proposed measures—including a new oversight body and new powers for the Information Commissioner's Office to monitor the use of this tech—present a path forward that we urge the Government to take. If we do not, we will continue to languish without a proper legal framework while permanent cameras are installed. For the technology to be embedded before safeguards have been properly considered would be a democratic and civil liberties tragedy and would put us on a path to a creeping digital authoritarianism. To put it another way, it would be unfair even on those who have to use the technology.

Currently, police services across the country seem to set their own rules on usage, without the proper guidance. To protect them from bad intelligence leading to awful miscarriages of justice, they deserve clarity, just as much as the public do, on the right way to make use of this tech. Nobody seriously doubts that this sort of technology and other major advancements in fighting crime will continue to arrive on our shores. The question is how we wield the new powers that they afford us in a judicious manner. That has always been the task for legislators and enforcers. Forgive the trite idiom, but it remains true that with great power comes great responsibility. How we protect privacy and liberty while keeping ourselves safe in the hyper-digital age is a central question of our times.

Matt Vickers: When deployed responsibly and with appropriate safeguards, facial recognition technology is an incredibly valuable tool in modern policing and public protection. It is already being used to identify serious offenders wanted for violent crime, terrorism

[Matt Vickers]

and child exploitation; to locate vulnerable individuals, including missing children at risk; and to enhance safety in high-risk environments such as transport hubs, major events and public demonstrations. It enables rapid real-time identification without the need for physical contact—something that traditional methods, such as fingerprinting and ID checks, cannot provide in fast-moving situations. It can accelerate investigations, reduce resource demand and ultimately make public spaces safer.

The technology is improving in accuracy, especially when governed by transparent oversight, independent auditing and clear operational boundaries. I would be grateful for further comments on whether the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam and the Government feel that this proposed regulation of this crucial technology could limit the ability of law enforcement to respond swiftly to emerging threats or intelligence-led operations.

Dame Diana Johnson: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam for setting out the case for introducing new safeguards for the use of live facial recognition. I agree there need to be appropriate safeguards, but the issue requires careful consideration and I do not think that it can be shoehorned into this Bill.

I say strongly to the hon. Member that live facial recognition is a valuable policing tool that helps keep communities safe. If I may say so, I think that some of his information is a little out of date. Despite what he implied, the use of facial recognition technology is already subject to safeguards, including, among others, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Data Protection Act 2008.

I fully accept, however, that there is a need to consider whether a bespoke legislative framework governing the use of live facial recognition technology for law enforcement purposes is needed. We need to get this right and balance the need to protect communities from crime and disorder while safeguarding individual rights. To that end, I have been listening to stakeholders and have already held a series of meetings about facial recognition, including with policing, regulators, research institutions, civil society groups and industry, to fully understand the concerns and what more can be done to improve the use of the technology.

I will outline our plans for facial recognition in the coming months. In the meantime, I hope that the hon. Member, having had this opportunity to air this important issue, will be content to withdraw his new clause.

Luke Taylor: Based on the comments and reassurances, I will be happy to withdraw the new clause. I would be interested in being involved in any discussions and updates as they come forward. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 22

Duty to follow strategic priorities of police and crime plan

"(1) The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 8(1) (Duty to have regard to police and crime plan), for 'have regard to' substitute 'follow the strategic priorities of'.

(3) In section 8(2) for 'have regard to' substitute 'follow the strategic priorities of'.

(4) In section 8(3) for 'have regard to' substitute 'follow the strategic priorities of'.

(5) In section 8(4) for 'have regard to' substitute 'follow the strategic priorities of'."—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would require Police and Crime Commissioners to follow the strategic priorities of the police and crime plan rather than have regard to it.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Matt Vickers: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 requires police and crime commissioners and others to "have regard to" the police and crime plan. The new clause would replace that language with a firmer obligation to "follow the strategic priorities of" the plan. The change would apply consistently across subsections (1) to (4) of section 8.

The primary rationale for the amendment is to strengthen democratic accountability. PCCs are directly elected by the public to represent local views and set the strategic direction for policing. Their police and crime plans are developed following consultation and are expected to reflect community priorities. However, under the current "have regard to" standard, there is only a weak legal duty to consider the plan, and no binding requirement to act in accordance with it. The new clause would address that gap by ensuring that PCCs and, by extension, police forces must follow the strategic priorities that they have set and communicated to the public.

3.30 pm

The change would also promote greater consistency and clarity in police governance. By obliging police leadership to follow the published strategic priorities, it would ensure a more coherent approach to planning, funding and operational decision making. It would help to eliminate ambiguity about how closely the police service must align with the PCC's plan, therefore supporting more effective delivery of services and clearer public expectations.

Importantly, the new clause respects the principle of operational independence. It would not give PCCs the power to interfere in day-to-day policing decisions, nor does it prescribe specific tactics or resource allocations. Instead, it focuses solely on the strategic level, ensuring that high-level priorities such as tackling knife crime, neighbourhood policing or victim support are meaningfully pursued by those responsible for implementation. While some may argue that requiring adherence to strategic priorities could reduce flexibility in practice, the change would enhance strategic discipline without removing responsiveness.

Police and crime plans are regularly reviewed and updated in consultation with local communities and partners. The new clause would ensure that, once priorities are agreed, they are not sidelined, but instead become the backbone of local policing strategy. The new clause would strengthen the link between the democratic mandate of the police and crime commissioner, and the operational activity of police forces. It would ensure that the police and crime plan is not a token document, but a guiding

framework for strategic decision making. By reinforcing the duty to follow agreed priorities, the new clause would enhance accountability, improve public trust and support the delivery of better, more responsive policing.

Dame Diana Johnson: I thank the shadow Minister for tabling the new clause. As hon. Members will be aware, those vested with responsibility for providing democratic oversight of police forces—whether PCCs or mayors with PCC functions—have an important role in policing across England and Wales. They are responsible for holding their chief constable to account for the performance of their force and for setting, through their police and crime plan, their strategic objectives for the area. In setting police and crime plans, PCCs must consult their chief constable, the public and victims of crime in their area, as well as their local police and crime panel. As the directly elected representatives for policing in their area, PCCs have a choice as to how they implement their plan and the weight they give to each priority.

The new clause would have the effect of placing an inflexible duty on PCCs to follow their own priorities, with no ability to adapt to and reflect changing circumstances. The new clause would also encroach on the operational independence of chief constables. It risks constraining chief constables and the officers under their command, limiting their ability to balance local priorities as set out in the police and crime plan with their own assessment of threat, risk and harm.

In setting their police and crime plan, PCCs and chief constables must also have regard to the strategic policing requirement. If the amendments to the 2011 Act set out in the new clause were made, they would also have the effect of creating an inconsistency, making local police and crime plans the most important instrument for PCCs and others to follow, potentially at the expense of national priorities. The Home Secretary and I have been clear that the Government will work with PCCs and chief constables to set clear expectations for policing on performance and standards, and to ensure that our communities have an effective and efficient police force within their force area.

Through our forthcoming police reform White Paper, we are working closely with policing to explore and develop specific proposals to deliver effective and efficient police forces and to address the challenges faced by policing. That includes ensuring that policing is responsive to national and regional priorities, as well as to local needs. The Home Secretary will set out a road map for police reform in a White Paper to be published later this year, which will consider proposals to strengthen the relationship between PCCs and chief constables in a revised policing protocol. For those reasons, I invite the shadow Minister to withdraw his new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 9.

Division No. 26]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Sabine, Anna
Rankin, Jack	Taylor, Luke
Robertson, Joe	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 23

PREVIOUS CONDUCT AS FACTOR IN DECIDING WHETHER TO INVESTIGATE A COMPLAINT

"(1) The Police Reform Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(2) In Schedule 3, paragraph 1(6B)(d), at end insert

'or

(e) the complaint is made about a person serving with the police who has previous convictions or has had previous complaints made against them.'."—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would make previous complaints or convictions a factor in determining how to handle a new complaint against a police officer.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 27]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 24

POINTS ON DRIVING LICENCE FOR FLY TIPPING

"(1) The Environmental Protection Act is amended as follows.

(2) In section 33, subsection 8(a) at end insert—

'and endorse their driving record with 3 penalty points;'."—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would add penalty points to the driving licence of a person convicted of a fly-tipping offence.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 28]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 25

REQUIREMENTS IN CERTAIN SENTENCES IMPOSED FOR THIRD OR SUBSEQUENT SHOPLIFTING OFFENCE

"(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In section 208 (community order: exercise of power to impose particular requirements), in subsections (3) and (6) after 'subsection (10)' insert 'and sections 208A'.

(3) After that section insert—

'208A Community order: requirements for third or subsequent shoplifting offence

(1) This section applies where—

(a) a person is convicted of adult shoplifting ("the index offence"),

(b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting or an equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence, and

(c) the court makes a community order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The community order must, subject to subsection (3), include at least one of the following requirements—

(a) a curfew requirement;

(b) an exclusion requirement;

(c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—

(a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—

(i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and

(ii) justify the court not including any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or

(b) neither of the following requirements could be included in the order—

(i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;

(ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) In subsection (1)(b), the reference to an occasion on which an offender was sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting does not include an occasion if—

(a) each conviction for adult shoplifting for which the offender was dealt with on that occasion has been quashed, or

(b) the offender was re-sentenced for adult shoplifting (and was not otherwise dealt with for adult shoplifting) on that occasion.

(5) In this section—

"adult shoplifting" means an offence under section 1 of the Theft Act 1968 committed by a person aged 18 or over in circumstances where—

(a) the stolen goods were being offered for sale in a shop or any other premises, stall, vehicle or place from which a trade or business was carried on, and

(b) at the time of the offence, the offender was, or was purporting to be, a customer or potential customer of the person offering the goods for sale;

"equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence" means—

(a) in Scotland, theft committed by a person aged 18 or over in the circumstances mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) of the definition of "adult shoplifting", or

(b) in Northern Ireland, an offence under section 1 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 committed by a person aged 18 or over in those circumstances.

(6) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be included in a community order if it could not otherwise be so included.

(7) Where—

(a) in a case to which this section applies, a court makes a community order which includes a requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2),

(b) a previous conviction of the offender is subsequently set aside on appeal, and

(c) without the previous conviction this section would not have applied,

notice of appeal against the sentence may be given at any time within 28 days from the day on which the previous conviction was set aside (despite anything in section 18 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968).'

(4) After section 292 insert—

'292A Suspended sentence order: community requirements for third or subsequent shoplifting offence

(1) This section applies where—

(a) a person is convicted of adult shoplifting ("the index offence"),

(b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting or an equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence, and

(c) the court makes a suspended sentence order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The suspended sentence order must, subject to subsection (3), impose at least one of the following requirements—

(a) a curfew requirement;

(b) an exclusion requirement;

(c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—

(a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—

(i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and

(ii) justify the court not imposing on the offender any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or

(b) neither of the following requirements could be imposed on the offender—

(i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;

(ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) Section 208A(4) (occasions to be disregarded) applies for the purposes of subsection (1)(b).

(5) In this section "adult shoplifting" and "equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence" have the meaning given by section 208A.

(6) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be imposed by a suspended sentence order if it could not otherwise be so imposed.

(7) Where—

(a) in a case to which this section applies, a court makes a suspended sentence order which imposes a requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2),

(b) a previous conviction of the offender is subsequently set aside on appeal, and

(c) without the previous conviction this section would not have applied,

notice of appeal against the sentence may be given at any time within 28 days from the day on which the previous conviction was set aside (despite anything in section 18 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968).'."—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause imposes a duty (subject to certain exceptions) to impose a curfew requirement, an exclusion requirement or an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement on certain persons convicted of shoplifting, where the offender is given a community sentence or suspended sentence order.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 29]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 26

REQUIREMENTS IN CERTAIN SENTENCES IMPOSED FOR THIRD ASSAULT OF RETAIL WORKER OFFENCE

"(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In section 208 (community order: exercise of power to impose particular requirements), in subsections (3) and (6) after 'and sections 208B' (inserted by section (Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third shoplifting offence) of this Act) insert 'and 208B'.

(3) After sections 208B insert—

'208B Community order: requirements for third or subsequent assault of retail worker offence

(1) This section applies where—

(a) a person is convicted of an offence under section 14 of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of retail worker) ("the index offence"),

(b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 committed when the offender was aged 18 or over, and

(c) the court makes a community order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The community order must, subject to subsection (3), include at least one of the following requirements—

(a) a curfew requirement;

(b) an exclusion requirement;

(c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—

(a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—

(i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and

(ii) justify the court not including any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or

(b) neither of the following requirements could be included in the order—

(i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;

(ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be included in a community order if it could not otherwise be so included.'

(4) After section 292A (inserted by section (Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third shoplifting offence) of this Act) insert—

'292B Suspended sentence order: community requirements for third or subsequent assault of retail worker offence

(1) This section applies where—

(a) a person is convicted of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of retail worker) ("the index offence"),

(b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 committed when the offender was aged 18 or over, and

(c) the court makes a suspended sentence order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The suspended sentence order must, subject to subsection (3), impose at least one of the following requirements—

(a) a curfew requirement;

(b) an exclusion requirement;

(c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—

(a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—

(i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and

(ii) justify the court not imposing on the offender any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or

(b) neither of the following requirements could be imposed on the offender—

(i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;

(ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be imposed by a suspended sentence order if it could not otherwise be so imposed.'"—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause imposes a duty (subject to certain exceptions) to impose a curfew requirement, an exclusion requirement or an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement on certain persons convicted of an offence under section 15, where the offender is given a community sentence or suspended sentence order.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 30]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 27

FINES FOR SALE OF STOLEN EQUIPMENT

"(1) The Equipment Theft Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 3 (Enforcement), subsection (2) at end insert 'equal to—

(a) the replacement cost of the equipment,

(b) the cost of repairing any damage caused during the theft, and

(c) the trading losses incurred by the offended party.'" —*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would ensure the fine charged to a person convicted of equipment theft would reflect the cost to a tradesman of replacing their equipment, repairing any damage to their equipment or property, and any business they've lost as a result.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 31]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 28

POWER TO DEPORT FOREIGN NATIONALS FOR POSSESSION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IMAGES

"(1) The Protection of Children Act 1978 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 1 (Indecent photographs of children) after subsection (4) insert—

'(4A) Where a person is a foreign national and is charged with—

(a) an offence under subsection (1), or

(b) is found to be carrying an electronic device storing child sexual abuse images under section 164B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979,

the Secretary of State must make a deportation order in accordance with section 32 of the UK Borders Act 2007.'"—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would make foreign nationals found in possession of child sexual abuse images subject to automatic deportation.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 32]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 29

ANNUAL REPORT ON POLICE ACTIONS IN AREAS WITH HIGH LEVELS OF SERIOUS OFFENCES

"(1) The Secretary of State must publish an annual report on police actions in areas with high levels of serious offences.

(2) Each such report must include data from police forces in England and Wales to identify areas with the highest rates of serious offences.

(3) For each area specified under subsection (2), each report must include data on—

(a) levels of police officers on duty;

(b) use of powers under section 1 (power of constable to stop and search persons, vehicles etc.) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; and

(c) use of live facial recognition technology.

(4) The first such report must be laid before Parliament within a period ending 6 months after the passing of this Act.

(5) Each subsequent report must be laid before Parliament within 12 months of the publication of the last report under this section.

(6) For the purposes of this section, 'serious offences' has the same meaning as in Schedule 1 of the Serious Crime Act 2007." —*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish annual reports on police presence, use of stop and search, and live facial recognition technology in areas with the highest levels of serious crime.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Matt Vickers: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 35—*Stop and search*—

"(1) The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 60(1)(a) and (aa) leave out 'serious.'."

This new clause lowers the threshold for stop and search to "violence" rather than "serious violence."

Matt Vickers: New clause 29 would introduce a statutory requirement for the Secretary of State to publish an annual report on specific police activities in areas experiencing high levels of serious crime. It would mandate the inclusion of data from police forces in England and Wales, identifying the areas with the highest rates of serious offences and reporting on three key areas: police presence, the use of stop-and-search powers, and the deployment of live facial recognition technology. The first report would be required within six months of the Act's passage, with subsequent reports published annually.

The primary objective of the new clause is to improve transparency and accountability in policing where serious crime is most acute. In communities disproportionately affected by violence, organised crime or persistent public disorder, trust in policing is often strained. By requiring detailed public reporting, the new clause would ensure that policing tactics and resourcing in those areas are subject to regular scrutiny by Parliament and the public. It would allow for an informed debate about whether interventions are effective, proportionate and fair.

In particular, the inclusion of data on police officer deployment would ensure a clearer understanding of how police resources are distributed. That is especially important in communities where concerns about under-policing or over-policing are frequently raised. Having a

publicly available record of officer presence would allow stakeholders to assess whether high-crime areas are receiving adequate attention and whether local policing strategies are matched to the severity of criminal activity.

The new clause also includes reporting on the use of stop and search powers under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Stop and search remains a contentious, yet extremely powerful tool in combating serious crime. Home Office statistics show that in the year ending 31 March 2023, there were 529,474 stop and searches in England and Wales. A recent study published in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* analysed London-wide stop-and-search patterns and concluded that if searches had been maintained at the 2008 to 2011 level, approximately 30 fewer knife murders might have occurred each year. By requiring annual data on its use in high-crime data, this new clause promotes responsible policing and ensures the use of the powers is evidence-led, not arbitrary, and open to challenge where necessary. It enables patterns of disproportionality or inefficiency to be identified and addressed through public oversight.

3.45 pm

The requirement to include data on the use of live facial recognition technology further reflects the growing public interest in how emerging technologies are deployed in law enforcement. Live facial recognition enhances a core function of policing by identifying individuals more quickly and accurately than traditional methods. Every deployment is carefully targeted, based on intelligence, limited in duration and confined to a specific geographic area, allowing police forces to focus their efforts where they are most likely to have the greatest impact.

Examples of where live facial recognition has been used include the Arsenal versus Tottenham north London derby on 24 September 2023, where it led to three arrests, including that of a suspected sex offender. During the coronation of King Charles, a wanted sex offender was identified through facial recognition. The system matched his image to that of a suspect wanted for breaching the terms of his release. He was subsequently arrested and returned to prison. On two busy Friday nights in Soho in August 2023, the Metropolitan police deployed facial recognition to identify individuals linked to serious offences. Across the two deployments, there were six accurate alerts and no false matches. The police engaged with six individuals, resulting in five arrests, including a man wanted for possession of a bladed article and a woman wanted for breaching bail in connection with a robbery.

Facial recognition is a powerful surveillance tool that raises important questions about privacy, consent and accuracy. Requiring annual reporting on its use ensures that its deployment is visible, justified and compliant with legal and ethical standards, especially in communities where its impact may be greatest.

Critically, new clause 29 strikes a careful balance: it does not restrict operational policing, nor does it dictate how or when specific powers should be used. Instead, it simply ensures that where serious crime is most prevalent, there is regular, structured reporting on how the police respond. That supports better policy making, strengthens community confidence and encourages police forces to reflect on and justify their approaches to crime prevention and enforcement.

New clause 29 introduces a proportionate and necessary mechanism for tracking and reviewing policing in the areas that need it most. It enables Parliament and the public to better understand how police powers and technologies are being used in response to serious offences, fostering a culture of transparency, fairness and evidence-based practice.

New clause 35 seeks to amend section 60(1)(a) and (aa) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 by removing the word "serious" before "violence". That change would reduce the threshold at which a police officer of or above the rank of inspector may authorise the use of stop-and-search powers in a defined locality for a limited time. The law currently allows that power where the officer reasonably believes that serious violence may occur or that people are carrying dangerous instruments or offensive weapons in connection with serious violence. The new clause would allow the authorisation in anticipation of any form of violence, not just violence that is considered serious.

In the year ending March 2024, police in England and Wales carried 535,307 stop and searches—down by 11,693 on the year ending March 2023, representing a 2.1% decrease. Despite the overall reduction in stop and searches, the number of arrests resulting from those searches under all the legislation rose by 1,772, a 2.4% increase, with a total of 75,953 arrests recorded. The proposed change would enable the police to act more proactively and preventively.

Waiting for a threshold of "serious violence" can delay intervention, especially when clear signs of escalating tensions, such as gang rivalry, public disorder or known threats, may not yet meet that high bar. By lowering the threshold to "violence", officers can intervene earlier to prevent harm, protect the public and de-escalate potentially dangerous situations before they result in serious injury or worse. In practice, police often face rapidly evolving situations where it is difficult to draw a clear line between violence and serious violence. The existing wording creates legal ambiguity and operational hesitation, and potentially ties the hands of officers in fast-moving public safety contexts. Proposed new clause 35 reflects operational reality and gives officers the clarity and flexibility that they need to respond effectively.

Importantly, the proposed new clause would not give the police blanket stop-and-search powers. Section 60 of the 1994 Act would remain time-limited and geographically specific, and would still require a senior officer's authorisation based on reasonable grounds. Lowering the threshold to "violence" would not remove the need for justification, but simply ensure that officers are not hamstrung by a legal distinction that might prevent timely intervention. Accountability mechanisms, including record keeping and oversight, would remain in place.

Used transparently and proportionately, stop and search can be a legitimate and effective tool in reducing violence. Clear communication about the rationale for its use, including public notifications when section 60 is authorised, helps to build trust in its deployment. Lowering the threshold would not undermine public confidence if the powers are exercised responsibly. Proposed new clause 35 is a measured and operationally meaningful change. It preserves the structure and safeguards of section 60, while allowing earlier, more effective intervention in response to anticipated violence. In so doing, it would strengthen the ability of the police to keep the public safe, particularly in urban areas, where violence

may escalate quickly, and ensure that the law better matches the practical needs of modern policing, without compromising accountability or fairness.

Dame Diana Johnson: I thank the hon. Member for his suggestions about the police response to violence and other serious offending. However, I believe that the changes contained in the proposed new clauses are unnecessary.

Regarding proposed new clause 29, I agree that transparency is important. That is why the Home Office already annually publishes extensive data on police recorded crime and the use of police powers. That data includes the number of stop and searches conducted, broken down by individual community safety partnership and police force areas. In addition, members of the public have access to detailed crime and stop and search maps on police.uk, which use monthly data directly provided by police forces. Police forces also publish detailed information on deployments of live facial recognition.

Turning to proposed new clause 35, I note that stop and search is a vital tool for tackling crime, particularly knife crime, but it must be used in a fair and effective way. That is particularly true of section 60 powers, which are the focus of the proposed new clause. Such powers may be authorised under certain conditions in response to, or anticipation of, serious violence, and allow officers to search individuals without the normal requirement for reasonable suspicion. The powers are rightly subject to strict constraints.

In practical terms, changing the threshold from "serious violence" to "violence" would not represent a meaningful change. Section 60 provides powers to search for offensive weapons or dangerous implements, and any use of such items is, by definition, serious violence. In the year to March 2024, the latest for which data is available, 5,145 stop and searches were undertaken in England and Wales under section 60 powers. They resulted in 71 people being found carrying offensive weapons and 212 arrests made on suspicion of a range of offences. I therefore urge the hon. Member to withdraw his proposed new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 33]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 30

SEIZURE OF MOTOR VEHICLES: DRIVING LICENCE PENALTIES

"(1) The Police Reform Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 59 (Vehicles used in a manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance), after subsection (6) insert—

"(6A) A person who is convicted of repeat offences under subsection (6) will have their driving licence endorsed with penalty points up to and including the revocation of their driving licence.""—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would make a person guilty of repeat offences of using vehicles in a manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance liable to penalty points on their driving licence or the revocation of their licence.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 34]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 31

AUTOMATIC DISMISSAL OF OFFICERS WHO FAIL VETTING

"(1) The Police Act 1996 is amended in accordance with subsection (2).

(2) In section 39A (Codes of practice for chief officers), after subsection (1) insert—

"(1A) Without prejudice to subsection (1) and subject to subsection (1B), a code of practice may provide for an officer to be dismissed without notice where—

(a) the officer fails vetting, and

(b) it is not reasonable to expect that the officer will be capable of being deployed to full duties within a reasonable timeframe.

(1B) Subsection (1A) does not apply where a chief officer concludes that—

(a) the officer, notwithstanding his vetting failure, is capable of being deployed to a substantial majority of duties appropriate for an officer of his rank; and

(b) it would be disproportionate to the operational effectiveness of the force for the officer to be dismissed without notice.""—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would ensure police officers who failed their vetting can be dismissed.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 35]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 32

THEFT FROM FARMS

"(1) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(2) In Chapter 3, *Aggravating Factors*, after section 72 insert—

"(72A) Theft from farms

(1) This section applies where the court is considering the seriousness of an offence specified in section 7 of The Theft Act 1968.

(2) If the theft was of high value farming equipment, the court—

(a) must treat that fact as an aggravating factor, and

(b) must state in open court that the offence is so aggravated.

(3) For the purposes of this section—

"high value farming equipment" is machinery and tools used in agricultural operations to enhance productivity and efficiency, with a value of at least £10,000.""—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause makes theft of high value farming equipment an aggravating factor on sentencing.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 36]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 33

DEFENCE TO CRIMINAL DAMAGE

"(1) The Criminal Damage Act 1971 is amended as follows.

(2) Leave out subsection 5(3) and insert—

'For the purposes of this section, a belief must be both honestly held and reasonable.'"—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would change the defence to criminal damage in the Criminal Damage Act 1971 to specify that the belief that the owner of the property would have consented must be reasonable.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Matt Vickers: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 33 seeks to amend section 5(3) of the Criminal Damage Act 1971, which currently states:

"For the purposes of this section it is immaterial whether a belief is justified or not if it is honestly held."

New clause 33 would replace that with:

"For the purposes of this section, a belief must be both honestly held and reasonable."

The change would modify the legal standard for the lawful excuse defence under section 5(2)(a) of the Criminal Damage Act, which allows a defendant to claim they believe the property owner consented to the damage. Under the current law, the belief needs only to be honest, regardless of its reasonableness. The new clause would require that the belief also be reasonable, introducing an objective standard alongside the subjective one.

In various areas of criminal law, defences based on belief require that it be honest and reasonable. For instance, in self-defence cases, the defendant's belief in the necessity of force must be reasonable. Aligning the standard in criminal damage cases with those principles promotes consistency and fairness across the legal system. Public confidence in the legal system can be undermined when defendants are acquitted based on defences that appear unreasonable or disconnected from common sense. By introducing an objective standard, the proposed new clause would reinforce the integrity of the justice system, and ensure that legal defences are applied in a manner that aligns with societal expectations.

The proposed amendment to section 5(3) of the Criminal Damage Act 1971 would introduce a necessary, objective standard to the lawful excuse defence by requiring that beliefs about owner consent be both honest and reasonable. The change would promote consistency with other areas of law, prevent potential abuses of the defence, balance the right to protest with property rights and seek to enhance public confidence in the justice system.

4 pm

Alex Davies-Jones: I thank the hon. Member for Stockton West for tabling new clause 33.

It might be helpful for hon. Members if I briefly explain how the Criminal Damage Act 1971 works. The Act criminalises a range of activities, but the offence we are focused on today is the act of destroying or damaging property belonging to another without lawful excuse. "Lawful excuse" is not defined. However, section 5(2)(a) makes it clear that if the defendant honestly believes that the person who was entitled to consent to the destruction or damage has given consent, or would have consented if they knew of the circumstances, the defendant has a lawful excuse. For example, it could be said that someone has a lawful excuse if the owner of a car would have consented to their damaging it to help a person who was trapped in it to get out.

Additionally, under section 5(2)(b) of the 1971 Act, if the defendant damages property to protect their own or someone else's property, and they honestly believe both that the property needs immediate protection and that their actions are reasonable, they have a lawful excuse. Section 5(3), to which the new clause relates, specifies that it does not matter whether a person's belief is reasonable or justified. It just needs to be honest, even if it is an honest belief induced by intoxication, stupidity or forgetfulness.

The new clause seeks to change the law so that where a defendant seeks to rely on belief in consent, or belief in the necessity of protecting property as a lawful excuse for criminal damage, their belief must be "reasonable" as well as honest. This would narrow the application of the defence, and we consider doing so unnecessary. The law is already designed to strike the right balance and ensure that a wide variety of factors are taken into account, without widening the law too far.

For example, if a defendant tries to argue that a person would have consented to the damage of their property if they had known the circumstances, they

[Alex Davies-Jones]

need to demonstrate how that relates specifically to the damage caused. Some assessment of the wider context will be necessary to determine whether someone has a lawful excuse.

Recent cases involving damage to property following protests have also interpreted the operation of this defence narrowly. For example, acting in furtherance of a protest cannot be used as a lawful excuse where the damage caused is more than minimal for public property. We cannot see any evidence or rationale that suggests that the defence is being used in spurious contexts or abused in any way. Of course, if the hon. Member has specific evidence or examples, we would, of course, consider them. Until then, there is no justification or need to restrict the operation of the defence further. For that reason, I urge him to withdraw the new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 37]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 34

MEANING OF SERIOUS DISRUPTION TO THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

"(1) Section 12 of the Public Order Act 1986 (imposing conditions on public processions) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2A), for the words from ", the cases" to the end substitute—

"(a) the cases in which a public procession in England and Wales may result in serious disruption to the life of the community include, in particular, where it may, by way of physical obstruction, result in—

(i) the prevention of, or a hindrance that is more than minor to, the carrying out of day-to-day activities (including in particular the making of a journey),

(ii) the prevention of, or a delay that is more than minor to, the delivery of a time-sensitive product to consumers of that product, or

(iii) the prevention of, or a disruption that is more than minor to, access to any essential goods or any essential service,

(b) in considering whether a public procession in England and Wales may result in serious disruption to the life of the community, the senior police officer—

(i) must take into account all relevant disruption, and

(ii) may take into account any relevant cumulative disruption, and

(c) "community", in relation to a public procession in England and Wales, means any group of persons that may be affected by the procession, whether or not all or any of those persons live or work in the vicinity of the procession.".

(3) In subsection (2B), for "subsection (2A)(a)" substitute "subsection (2A) and this subsection—

"access to any essential goods or any essential service" includes, in particular, access to—

(a) the supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel,

(b) a system of communication,

(c) a place of worship,

(d) a transport facility,

(e) an educational institution, or

(f) a service relating to health;

"area", in relation to a public procession or public assembly, means such area as the senior police officer considers appropriate, having regard to the nature and extent of the disruption that may result from the procession or assembly;

"relevant cumulative disruption", in relation to a public procession in England and Wales, means the cumulative disruption to the life of the community resulting from—

(a) the procession,

(b) any other public procession in England and Wales that was held, is being held or is intended to be held in the same area as the area in which the procession mentioned in paragraph (a) is being held or is intended to be held (whether or not directions have been given under subsection (1) in relation to that other procession), and

(c) any public assembly in England and Wales that was held, is being held or is intended to be held in the same area in which the procession mentioned in paragraph (a) is being held or is intended to be held (whether or not directions have been given under section 14(1A) in relation to that assembly), and it does not matter whether or not the procession mentioned in paragraph (a) and any procession or assembly within paragraph (b) or (c) are organised by the same person, are attended by any of the same persons or are held or are intended to be held at the same time;

"relevant disruption", in relation to a public procession in England and Wales, means all disruption to the life of the community—

(a) that may result from the procession, or

(b) that may occur regardless of whether the procession is held (including in particular normal traffic congestion);".

(4) Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 (imposing conditions on public assemblies) is amended as follows.

(5) In subsection (2A), for the words from ", the cases" to the end substitute "—

(a) the cases in which a public assembly in England and Wales may result in serious disruption to the life of the community include, in particular, where it may, by way of physical obstruction, result in—

(i) the prevention of, or a hindrance that is more than minor to, the carrying out of day-to-day activities (including in particular the making of a journey),

(ii) the prevention of, or a delay that is more than minor to, the delivery of a time-sensitive product to consumers of that product, or

(iii) the prevention of, or a disruption that is more than minor to, access to any essential goods or any essential service,

(b) in considering whether a public assembly in England and Wales may result in serious disruption to the life of the community, the senior police officer—

(i) must take into account all relevant disruption, and

(ii) may take into account any relevant cumulative disruption, and

(c) "community", in relation to a public assembly in England and Wales, means any group of persons that may be affected by the assembly, whether or not all or any of those persons live or work in the vicinity of the assembly.".

(6) In subsection (2B), for "subsection (2A)(a)" substitute "subsection (2A) and this subsection—

"access to any essential goods or any essential service" includes, in particular, access to—

(a) the supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel,

(b) a system of communication,

(c) a place of worship,

(d) a transport facility,

(e) an educational institution, or

(f) a service relating to health;

"area", in relation to a public assembly or public procession, means such area as the senior police officer considers appropriate, having regard to the nature and extent of the disruption that may result from the assembly or procession;

"relevant cumulative disruption", in relation to a public assembly in England and Wales, means the cumulative disruption to the life of the community resulting from—

(a) the assembly,

(b) any other public assembly in England and Wales that was held, is being held or is intended to be held in the same area in which the assembly mentioned in paragraph (a) is being held or is intended to be held (whether or not directions have been given under subsection (1A) in relation to that other assembly), and

(c) any public procession in England and Wales that was held, is being held or is intended to be held in the same area as the area in which the assembly mentioned in paragraph (a) is being held or is intended to be held (whether or not directions have been given under section 12(1) in relation to that procession),

and it does not matter whether or not the assembly mentioned in paragraph (a) and any assembly or procession within paragraph (b) or (c) are organised by the same person, are attended by any of the same persons or are held or are intended to be held at the same time;

"relevant disruption", in relation to a public assembly in England and Wales, means all disruption to the life of the community—

(a) that may result from the assembly, or

(b) that may occur regardless of whether the assembly is held (including in particular normal traffic congestion).""—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause defines "serious disruption to the life of the community" so as to amend the effects of the Zeigler judgement.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 38]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 35

STOP AND SEARCH

"(1) The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 60(1)(a) and (aa) leave out "serious.""—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause lowers the threshold for stop and search to "violence" rather than "serious violence."

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 39]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 36

REMOVAL OF PROHIBITION ON ENTERING A PRIVATE DWELLING TO CONFISCATE AN OFF-ROAD BIKE

"(1) The Road Traffic Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 165A, after subsection (5)(c) insert—

"(5A) In exercising their powers under subsection (5), a constable may enter a private dwelling house for the purposes of seizing an off-road bike".

(3) The Police Reform Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(4) In section 59(7), at end insert ", except where the intention is to seize an off-road bike.""—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would remove the prohibition on the police entering a private dwelling to confiscate an off-road bike that is driven without a licence, uninsured, or being used illegally.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 40]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 37

POWER TO SEIZE VEHICLES DRIVEN WITHOUT LICENCE OR INSURANCE

"(1) The Road Traffic Accident Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 165A, omit "within the period of 24 hours"."

—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would remove the 24-hour time limit for the seizing of vehicles where a person has failed to produce a licence or evidence of insurance.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 41]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 38

POLICE ACCESS TO THE UK TOBACCO TRACK AND TRACE SYSTEM

"(1) The Secretary of State must, through regulations, make provision for the police to access the HMRC tobacco track and trace system for the purposes of determining the provenance of tobacco products sold by retailers."—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would allow the police to access the UK Tobacco Track and Trace system for the purposes of determining whether a retailer has obtained stolen or counterfeit tobacco illegally.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Matt Vickers: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause would mandate that the Secretary of State, through regulations, grant police access to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs' tobacco track and trace system. Such access would enable law enforcement to determine the provenance of tobacco products sold by retailers, specifically to identify whether those products were stolen. According to HMRC, the illicit market in tobacco duty and related VAT was £2.8 billion in 2021-22, preying on the most disadvantaged of communities. In 2023, about 6.7 billion counterfeit and contraband cigarettes were consumed, representing one in four cigarettes, thus undermining progress towards a smoke-free England by 2030.

With the negative impact that the illicit tobacco market has on communities and with UK revenue in mind, it is paramount that our police forces be provided with the resources required to counter the organised crime groups that dominate the illicit tobacco market. The sale of illicit tobacco on the black market also poses significant risks to public health, with illegal tobacco often containing five times the standard level of cadmium, six times as much lead, 1.6 times more tar and 1.3 times more carbon monoxide than regulated cigarettes and rolling tobacco.

The illicit tobacco market poses significant challenges, including revenue loss for the Government and health risks for consumers. Professor Emmeline Taylor's report, "Lighting Up", emphasises the potential of TT&T in identifying and prosecuting offenders involved in the illegal tobacco trade. Granting police access to TT&T would strengthen efforts to dismantle organised crime networks profiting from counterfeit tobacco sales.

Giving the police access to TT&T technology has the potential to disrupt the illicit tobacco trade and has been highlighted by the National Business Crime Centre, which argues that police utilisation of TT&T would allow them to routinely check tobacco sold by local retailers to ensure legitimacy, thus shrinking the pool of buyers for criminal gangs and lowering demand for stolen tobacco, helping police to tackle organised crime and safeguard legitimate business.

As a signatory to the World Health Organisation's framework convention on tobacco control, the UK is obligated to implement measures that curb illicit tobacco trade. Providing police with TT&T access aligns with those commitments by enhancing the traceability and accountability of tobacco products throughout the supply chain. Illicit tobacco sales undermine legitimate retailers who comply with regulations and pay due taxes. Empowering police to identify and act against illegal tobacco products helps to level the playing field, ensuring that law-abiding businesses are not disadvantaged by competitors engaging in unlawful practices.

With that in mind, the Opposition believe that new clause 38, which would grant police access to the UK TT&T system to help determine whether a retailer has obtained stolen or counterfeit tobacco illegally, is necessary to facilitate the police in carrying out their duty in delivering the current plans for smoke-free England 2030. It will help to claim back revenue currently lost to the black market trade of tobacco and protect public health by disrupting the trade in these bogus products.

Dame Diana Johnson: New clause 38 seeks to grant the police access to the tobacco track and trace system, as we have just heard. The scourge of the illicit tobacco trade threatens the health of UK citizens, robs the public purse of billions of pounds and funds the wider activities of organised crime. All businesses in the tobacco supply chain are required to register within the track and trace system, and individual tobacco products are tracked from the point of manufacture up to the point of retail. The track and trace system includes a reporting platform that enables nominated authorities to access registry data, traceability data for individual products and UK-wide tobacco market data.

I understand the intention behind the shadow Minister's new clause, and I know that we both share the same goal of working with our law enforcement agencies to tackle illicit tobacco. The principle of maximising the use of traceability data in these efforts to tackle illicit tobacco is sound. Existing legislation strictly limits who can access traceability and the purposes for which it may be used. At the moment, only HMRC and trading standards may access this data.

I reassure the Opposition that engagement is already under way between the police and HMRC to investigate opportunities for extending access for the police to traceability data. When that engagement is complete, the Government will consider whether it is appropriate to bring forward any necessary legislative changes. However, I do not wish, at this stage, to pre-empt the outcome of

that engagement through legislation. In the light of those reassurances, I ask the shadow Minister to withdraw the motion.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 9.

Division No. 42]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Sabine, Anna
Rankin, Jack	Taylor, Luke
Robertson, Joe	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 39

DUTY TO DESTROY SEIZED OFF-ROAD BIKES

"(1) The Road Traffic Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 165B(2), at end insert ';

(g) where the seized motor vehicle is an off-road bike, to ensure its destruction by the police'.

(3) The Police Reform Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(4) In section 60(2), at end insert ';

(g) where the seized motor vehicle is an off-road bike, to ensure its destruction by the police.'"—*(Matt Vickers.)*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 43]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 40

REGISTRATION OF OFF-ROAD BIKES

"(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, issue a consultation on a registration scheme for the sale of off-road bikes.

(2) The consultation must consider the merits of—

(i) requiring sellers to record the details of buyers, and

(ii) verifying that buyers have purchased insurance."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to consult on a registration scheme for the resale off-road bikes.—(Matt Vickers.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.

Division No. 44]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Robertson, Joe
Rankin, Jack	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Mather, Keir
Bishop, Matt	Phillips, Jess
Burton-Sampson, David	Platt, Jo
Davies-Jones, Alex	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 41

SOLICITING PROSTITUTION FOR RENT OFFENCE

"(1) The Sexual Offences Act 2003 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 52 (causing or inciting prostitution for gain) insert—

'52A Soliciting prostitution for rent

(1) A person commits an offence if—

(a) they intentionally cause or incite a person to become a prostitute in exchange for accommodation;

(b) they intentionally cause or incite a person to become a prostitute in exchange for a reduction in money paid as rent for a property;

(c) they attempt to cause or incite a person to become a prostitute in exchange for accommodation; or

(d) they attempt to cause or incite a person to become a prostitute in exchange for a reduction in money paid as rent for a property.

These offences refer to both properties owned or resided in by the offender.

(2) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or both;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 7 years; or

(c) to a "banning order" as defined in part 2, chapter 2 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016.'"—*(Matt Vickers.)*

This new clause would create a new offence of soliciting prostitution in exchange for rent and allow offenders to be banned from renting properties after the offence.

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.15 pm

Matt Vickers: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause would introduce a new statutory offence of soliciting prostitution in exchange for rent by inserting proposed new section 52A into the Sexual Offences Act 2003. It would criminalise the act of causing, inciting or attempting to cause or incite someone to engage in prostitution in return for free accommodation or discounted rent. The clause makes this a hybrid offence: on summary conviction, the penalty is up to six months' imprisonment or a fine; on indictment, it is

[Matt Vickers]

up to seven years' imprisonment. It would also allow for a banning order under the Housing and Planning Act 2016, preventing convicted offenders from acting as landlords.

The "sex for rent" arrangement—where landlords exchange accommodation for free or at a discount in return for sexual relations with tenants—is a problem that has become increasingly common for house hunters in England, particularly in London. In response to this emerging issue, the last Government launched a call for evidence, which closed in the summer of 2023. It sought views on relevant characteristics, circumstances and any additional protective or preventive measures that respondents considered necessary. Given the seriousness of the issue, it would be helpful to know whether the Government intend to publish the findings from this call for evidence, as some of the data could inform debates such as this one.

According to research by polling company YouGov carried out on behalf of the housing charity Shelter, nearly one in 50 women in England have been propositioned for sex for rent in the last five years, with 30,000 women offered such housing arrangements between March 2020 and January 2021. Many victims of sex-for-rent schemes feel trapped, ashamed or powerless to report the abuse due to their dependency on accommodation. By clearly defining this as a criminal offence and providing real consequences for offenders, including banning orders, this clause sends a strong message: exploitation through coercive housing arrangements will not be tolerated.

The charity National Ugly Mugs, an organisation that works towards ending all violence towards sex workers, gave the case study of a tenant who, during the pandemic facing financial hardship, was approached by her landlord with a proposal to reduce her rent and utility costs in exchange for sexual acts and explicit images. Unable to afford alternative accommodation at the time, she felt she had little choice but to agree. Since then, the landlord has regularly turned up at the property uninvited and intoxicated, demanding sex and refusing to leave. She has lived under the constant threat of eviction and homelessness if she does not comply with his demands. The new clause represents a crucial advance in safeguarding vulnerable individuals from exploitation within the housing sector. By explicitly criminalising the act of soliciting sexual services in exchange for accommodation, it addresses a significant gap in the current legal framework.

The new clause would not only reinforce the seriousness of such offences through stringent penalties, but would empower authorities to impose banning orders, thereby preventing convicted individuals from further exploiting their position as landlords. This measure would send a clear and unequivocal message that leveraging housing and security for sexual gain is a reprehensible abuse of power that will not be tolerated. It would underscore a commitment to protecting the dignity and rights of tenants, ensuring that all individuals have access to safe and respectful living conditions.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jess Phillips): New clause 41, tabled by the hon. Member for Stockton West, would make it an offence to provide free or discounted rent in exchange for sex. I reassure the hon. Member that the Government firmly believe that the exploitation and abuse that can occur through so-called sex-for-rent arrangements has no place in our society. However, we have existing offences that can and have been used to prosecute this practice, including causing or controlling prostitution for gain.

I know the hon. Member will appreciate that this is a complex issue. I reassure the Committee that the Government will continue working closely with the voluntary and community sector, the police and others to ensure that the safeguarding of women remains at the heart of our approach. We are carefully considering these issues as part of our wider work on violence against women and girls. We are working to publish the new cross-government violence against women and girls strategy later this year. We will be considering all forms of adult sexual exploitation and the findings from the previous Government's consultation on sex for rent as part of that.

Given that commitment, I hope the hon. Member will be content to withdraw the new clause, although I very much doubt that he will. On that note, I have tabled many Opposition amendments, but I very rarely pushed them to a vote. On this new clause, as on any others, the hon. Member or any other Members of his party are very welcome to approach us for a meeting, or to come and talk to any of us about how to progress this or any issue. I do not wish to school them on opposition, but that is a much more likely way of achieving the ultimate aim. In this instance, his aim is the same as mine—protecting people who are sexually exploited. To date, no approaches have been made, but they are always welcome.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 8.

Division No. 45]

AYES

Cross, Harriet	Sabine, Anna
Rankin, Jack	Taylor, Luke
Robertson, Joe	Vickers, Matt

NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Bishop, Matt	Mather, Keir
Burton-Sampson, David	Phillips, Jess
Davies-Jones, Alex	Platt, Jo

Question accordingly negatived.

The Chair: Before we adjourn, I want to let the Committee know that I will not be chairing the next sitting—it will be a more esteemed Chair than myself. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for today's contributions and their attention to the Bill, all our fantastic Clerks, the Doorkeepers, Hansard, the hidden but wonderful broadcasting team, and of course the hard-working officials from the Home Office. Thank you all very much indeed.

Ordered, That further consideration be now adjourned. *—(Keir Mather.)*

4.25 pm

Adjourned till Tuesday 13 May at twenty-five minutes past Nine o'clock.

Written evidence reported to the House

CPB 95 Matt Easton

CPB 96 Liberty

CPB 97 A UK-based client of sex workers

CPB 98 An organisation that wishes to remain anonymous

CPB 99 Mouvement du Nid

CPB 100 Sleepyboy.com / sleepypro.sl

CPB 101 ESRC Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre (on county lines policing and vulnerability in the UK) (further evidence)

CPB 102 Dr Niina Vuolajärvi, Assistant Professor at the London School of Economics

CPB 103 Lxo Cohen – Welfare Safeguard & Monitor (Riot Party UK, Quench, HOWL Worldwide, Riposte, Pinky Promise etc.), Business Development Consultant (HOWL Worldwide). Submitted in a personal capacity

CPB 104 Wheels for Wellbeing

CPB 105 A Certified Sexological Bodyworker

CPB 106 BT Group

CPB 107 Stop the War Coalition

CPB 108 Dr Ella Cockbain, Lead of UCL Research Group on Human Trafficking, Smuggling and Exploitation, University College London

CPB 109 An Independent British Sex Worker

CPB 110 Elizabeth Mc Guinness, M.A., M.Sc

CPB 111 Dr Mary Laing, Lecturer in Sociology, University of York

CPB 112 ASB Help

CPB 113 City of London Corporation

CPB 114 Amnesty International UK (further submission) (related to NC1, 2 and 3)

CPB 115 Resolve ASB

CPB 116 Rail Delivery Group

CPB 117 Network Rail

CPB 118 Oasis Project

CPB 119 Centre for Justice Innovation