

**Thursday  
26 May 2022**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 26 May 2022**

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 26 May 2022*

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

## PRAYERS

*The Chairman of Ways and Means took the Chair as Deputy Speaker (Order, 23 May, and Standing Order No. 3).*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*  
**Racehorses**

1. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the effect of the Government's tax policies on the movement of racehorses between the UK, Ireland and France; and if he will make a statement. [R] [900235]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Chris Philp):** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and pay tribute to his tireless work campaigning on behalf of the horse-racing industry. The Government recognise the contribution that racing makes to our sporting culture and to the rural economy. We equally understand the critical importance of being able to move racehorses across international borders. We are aware that the industry has provided proposals to HMRC and the Treasury regarding the VAT arrangements, and I can tell the House that the Treasury is actively considering those proposals at the moment.

**Mr Robertson:** I thank the Minister for that encouraging answer. As he knows, the owners of racehorses coming to this country to race have to deposit a VAT-equivalent security, returnable when they leave, whereas the owners of horses coming to this country for what are classified as work purposes do not. Given that it would not cost the Exchequer anything to correct this anomaly, and that it would help cash flow and reduce the administrative burden on racehorse owners, I hope that the Minister will continue to speak to the Treasury with a view to correcting it.

**Chris Philp:** I thank my hon. Friend for his clear articulation of the issue and his powerful expression of it. I will certainly convey that to Treasury colleagues who are currently considering the matter.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Can I just say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I really enjoyed the different tradition we had this morning when we entered the Chamber? It is the first time I have seen it, and I would like to say how well the House does it.

Racehorses are very important to my constituency; they are an integral part of some of my constituents' lives. The Northern Ireland protocol has obviously complicated things, so can the Minister tell me how my constituents in the racehorse industry in Strangford and in Northern Ireland can get through the minefield of bureaucracy and red tape?

**Chris Philp:** The Government are extremely mindful of the challenges that the way the Northern Ireland protocol is being applied is imposing on communities across Northern Ireland. It clearly affects the horse-racing industry as it affects others. I know that my colleagues across Government are working extremely hard as we speak to find practical ways of fixing those problems, and I am sure that my colleague the Foreign Secretary will keep the hon. Member and the House updated on her efforts.

**Matt Hancock** (West Suffolk) (Con): The anomaly on VAT, which ridiculously argues that a racehorse coming here to race or a brood mare coming here to breed is not coming for work, needs to be sorted.

Can the Minister also please ensure that the horserace betting levy is increased and reformed far sooner than is currently proposed? Although horse-racing is doing great at the moment, there is a significant challenge with the low level of prize money, which is leading to fewer runners and too many horses running overseas rather than here. We need to make sure we support the industry.

**Chris Philp:** I thank the former Secretary of State, who is a representative of a horse-racing constituency, for his question. Clearly quite a lot of money is going into the horse-racing industry via the levy. It is on track to raise about £100 million this year, most of which ends up in prize money. However, my right hon. Friend has made a number of powerful representations, both in this House and privately, about the need to review that levy earlier than was planned, and his powerful representations are being actively considered as we speak.

### Broadband

2. **Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): What recent progress has been made on the roll-out of broadband. [900236]

**The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure (Julia Lopez):** We are making excellent progress on delivering the biggest broadband upgrade in UK history, so that we have fast, reliable digital infrastructure for decades to come. In the past three years, national gigabit coverage has rocketed from 6% to 68%, we are investing £5 billion so that people in hard-to-reach areas can get ultra-reliable speeds, and we have already upgraded more than 600,000 premises. We also have £500 million-worth of contracts out for tender covering areas from Cumbria to Cornwall.

**Helen Morgan:** Under this Government, broadband speeds are anything but levelled up. For example, the average download speed in North Shropshire is just 49 megabits per second. In Tiverton and Honiton it is just 43 megabits per second, which is half the national average of 86 megabits per second and 60% slower than the average speed in London. The Prime Minister reportedly

cracks jokes about this behind closed doors, but if the Government truly care about rural Britain, why are they leaving it in the digital slow lane?

**Julia Lopez:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question, but I do not share her characterisation of what is happening. I am pleased to say that there is almost 99% superfast coverage in her North Shropshire constituency, which is above the national average. Shropshire is also included in lot 25 of Project Gigabit, so those areas that are not covered by the very fast commercial roll-out of our gigabit scheme will be out for procurement—we expect it to happen in the next year—in order to build to those harder-to-reach premises.

In the meantime, if there are any premises in North Shropshire that can receive vouchers, I recommend that the hon. Lady's constituents apply for them. I am also pleased to say that Shropshire Council is supporting a local top-up fund to supplement our voucher subsidy and has invested £2 million to date. As I say, I do not agree with her characterisation of the progress we are making.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I know that my hon. Friend shares my and my constituents' frustration at the failure of the Scottish Government and their ironically named Reaching 100% scheme to deliver for people in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* It is six years late and millions of pounds over budget, notwithstanding the protestations of the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). What is the Department doing to help level up broadband connectivity for my constituents in rural Scotland?

**Julia Lopez:** The situation in Scotland is, admittedly, tricky. I have talked to my counterpart in the Scottish Government, and the Scottish Government's strategy prioritises some of the islands and seeks to have greater spend in some of those hard-to-reach areas than we have in parts of England. I cannot ask people in other parts of the country to suffer for decisions made by the Scottish Government on the areas they are prioritising. I am keen to continue working with the Scottish Government on trying to get connectivity to Scotland, because I share my hon. Friend's passion for that, but we are also looking at what we can do for the very hardest-to-reach premises, a number of which are in Scotland.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

A staggering 1.1 million people struggle to afford the most basic broadband and mobile services, and the pandemic has only reinforced the fact that broadband is now truly the fourth utility. Our day-to-day lives cannot function without it. Inflation is now running at 9%, and broadband packages have risen by 12%. With the roll-out stagnating, prices rising and household incomes being squeezed, why did the Government and Ofcom allow Openreach and other providers to raise network prices above inflation, hitting consumers and raking in profits, without real investment in full fibre?

**Julia Lopez:** I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman that such services are now key utilities. As he will know, we debated the Product Security and Telecommunications

Infrastructure Bill yesterday, in which we are seeking to bring down rents to reduce prices for operators and, therefore, for consumers.

The hon. Gentleman will also be aware of the great work we did on social tariffs with providers throughout the pandemic. The Secretary of State recently wrote to providers to understand what more the Government can do to promote those social tariffs. We have also been working with the Department for Work and Pensions to roll out social tariffs to even more people, particularly those on universal credit.

**Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): It is pleasing, week on week, to see more and more villages in my constituency getting fibre-to-the-premises broadband, but many small operators tell me that the "Equinox" Openreach discount on the wholesale price is having a distorting effect on the speed of roll-out from those smaller operators, particularly to rural communities. Has my hon. Friend modelled the impact that that discount is having on the market? What can her Department do to fix it?

**Julia Lopez:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important regulatory issue, which is actually led by Ofcom. It has been raised with me by altnets, and it is of concern. The Government want as much competition in the market as possible, as we think that is speeding up roll-out. The commercial sector is going great guns on this. I appreciate his concerns, and this week I met Councillor Martin Tett in the Buckingham constituency to talk about what more we can do to speed up the roll-out to my hon. Friend's constituents.

### Cyber-threats

3. **Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to strengthen the UK's defences against cyber-threats. [900237]

**The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure (Julia Lopez):** My Department is playing an active role in delivering the national cyber strategy 2022, backed by £2.6 billion of public money. That includes a focus on enhancing the nation's cyber-skills. The UK Cyber Security Council was launched by the Department last year and received its royal charter in early 2022. It will play a key role in building world-leading skills architecture for the cyber profession. We are also ensuring that tech is designed in a secure way, and our new Telecommunications (Security) Act 2021 is helping to protect the most vulnerable parts of UK networks and services.

**Mr Baker:** Given that fraud is one of the main purposes of cyber-attack, will the Government take the advice of the Royal United Services Institute to make cyber-security and tackling fraud a national security priority, so that the full apparatus of our security establishment can be brought to bear against overseas fraudsters?

**Julia Lopez:** My hon. Friend raises an important issue. Tackling fraud needs a co-ordinated response from Government, so although policy on fraud is led by the Home Office, I assure him that the Government as a whole are taking significant action. I mentioned our national cyber strategy. We have also secured funding so

that the UK intelligence community can set up a dedicated anti-fraud mission, and later this year we will publish a new strategy to address the threat. The Department recently introduced the Online Safety Bill, which will tackle some forms of online fraud and fraudulent advertising, and that will be built on by a wider online advertising programme.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Cyber-threats come in lots of guises, ranging from spreading misinformation to undermining democracy, stealing data and intelligence, and fraud, as we have just heard from the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker). Perhaps the most serious threat is the downing of critical infrastructure. What assessment has the Minister made of both the threats on downing critical infrastructure in the UK and how we overcome and challenge the people who seek to do it?

**Julia Lopez:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for taking this issue so seriously. We, as a House, need to give great consideration to it. We have a number of new powers in place, including the National Security and Investment Act 2021, which gives us greater powers to look into some of the investments being made in this area. On critical national infrastructure, he will understand that I cannot go into great detail, but I simply wish to assure him that I spend a great deal of time on that issue. The more that consumers and businesses depend on our critical national infrastructure, the greater attention the House needs to pay to it, and I assure him that I am doing a lot of working in that space.

#### Online Harm: Women and Girls

4. **Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of provisions in the Online Safety Bill on the level of protection from online harm and abuse for women and girls. [900240]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Chris Philp):** The Online Safety Bill, which went into Committee on Tuesday, rightly has extremely strong protections for women and girls. The hon. Lady will have noticed that, in schedule 7, crimes such as harassment, stalking, revenge porn and extreme porn are designated as “priority offences”, and those measures protect women in particular. They are offences where social media firms have proactively to take steps to prevent that content appearing online. We have also added cyber-flashing as a new criminal offence to the Bill.

**Catherine West:** Will the Minister consider what penalties can be brought against social media companies that fail in their duty to protect young girls and women, given that the number of eating disorders have risen exponentially in the past few years and, sadly, young women and girls are having suicidal thoughts owing to the way these automatic artificial intelligence practices work? What action will the Minister take on that?

**Chris Philp:** The hon. Lady is raising an incredibly important issue. Both girls and boys are covered under the provisions that protect children from harms. When we designate the list of harms, I expect that it will include eating-related matters and suicide and self-harm content, mindful of the terrible case of Molly Russell,

who committed suicide after being bombarded on Instagram. We will also be publishing, in due course, the list of harms applying to adults. The penalties that will be applied if companies breach these duties include fines of up to 10% of global revenue, which tends to be about 100% of UK revenue. In extreme cases, if they persistently fail to comply, there are denial of service provisions, where these platforms’ ability to—[*Interruption.*] This is an important question. Their ability to transmit into the UK can be completely disconnected.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will the Minister consider amending the Online Safety Bill in the light of the Financial Conduct Authority’s recent warning that there has been an 86% increase in screen-sharing scams in just the past 12 months?

**Chris Philp:** Yes. The Bill is technology-agnostic, meaning that it does not refer specifically to technology because, obviously, technologies evolve all the time. My hon. Friend touches on fraud; the Bill was amended before its introduction to include in the scope of its duties advertisements that promote fraud, but I am happy to meet him to discuss further the particular issue he has raised.

**Alex Davies-Jones** (Pontypridd) (Lab): Violence against women and girls is a systemic problem online, but the Government have failed even to name it in the Bill. The Minister knows that there is widespread support for tackling this issue in the sector and among his own Back Benchers, and I know that Members from all parties would welcome it if he went further. I ask once and for all: why have the Government failed to tackle violence against women and girls online in its most basic form and not included misogyny as a priority offence in the Bill?

**Chris Philp:** I strongly dispute the suggestion that the Bill does not protect women and girls. I have already said in response to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) that we have created a new cyber-flashing offence and that we have named offences such as harassment, stalking and revenge porn as priority offences—

**Alex Davies-Jones:** Have you got it in the Bill?

**Chris Philp:** Those things are already priority offences in schedule 7 to the Bill. The Bill went into Committee on Tuesday and I look forward to discussing with the shadow Minister and other Committee members ideas to improve the Bill as it goes through Parliament.

**David Johnston** (Wantage) (Con): I warmly welcome what we are doing with the Online Safety Bill to protect people from harm, because tech companies have been far too lax at doing so for far too long, but there is concern in some quarters that we will unintentionally end up restricting freedom of speech by conflating opinions that people do not like to hear with actual harms that are done online. Will my hon. Friend reassure me that we will ensure that we stay on the right side of that line and protect freedom of speech in the Bill?

**Chris Philp:** Yes, I can categorically give that assurance. There has been some misinformation around this issue. First, there is nothing at all in the Bill that requires social media firms to censor or prohibit speech that is



legal and that is harmless to children. Reports to the contrary are quite simply untrue. In fact, there is express provision in the Bill: clause 19(2) expressly provides for a new duty on social media firms to have regard to free speech. Such a provision does not currently exist.

#### Fan-led Review of Football Governance

5. **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the recommendations on the financial sustainability of football clubs in the fan-led review of football governance; and if she will make a statement. [900242]

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries):** The fan-led review of football governance identified financial sustainability as a core issue affecting the game, which is why the primary focus of the new independent football regulator will be to improve clubs' financial sustainability, to protect them now and in the future. Further details will be set out in the White Paper in the summer.

**Jessica Morden:** Newport County AFC is a leading Fair Game club and a great example of how supporter ownership can bring about sustainable financial and governance structures and excellent community engagement; it is certainly true in the County's case. With that in mind, will the Minister meet Fair Game to discuss its proposal for a sustainability index, which would overhaul the parachute-payments system and reward responsible clubs that demonstrate that they put their supporters first?

**Ms Dorries:** The regulator will be tasked with improving how clubs are financially and operationally run. Improving corporate governance and financial oversight will greatly reduce the likelihood of financial distress and make football much more resilient and sustainable for the long term. [Interruption.] The Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), who is the Minister responsible, has just whispered to me that he would be happy to meet the hon. Lady.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): I think the whole country is looking forward to the women's European football championships being held in England this summer. That will provide a further boost for one of the fastest growing sports in the country. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the agreement that the FA has reached to redistribute money from the Premier League to the women's game, and the fact that that will support grassroots football for women and girls?

**Ms Dorries:** I am absolutely delighted to endorse my hon. Friend's comments. It will be a fantastic summer, with not just the Euro 22 women's finals, but the Commonwealth games; it will be a summer of sport. It is a fantastic decision. Women in sport do not get enough sponsorship, enough time on television, enough support, or enough money. Pushing women in sport is a key priority of my Department, and this is a great decision. We want to see more decisions like that moving forward.

#### Office Working

6. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What her policy is on the proportion of time that officials in her Department are expected to work from departmental premises. [900243]

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries):** We operate hybrid working, whereby staff are expected to spend, on average, two days a week in the office, recognising that some roles require more office-based work than others. This is designed to maximise the use of our office capacity, as we currently have 800 desks for 2,000 staff in London. There are huge advantages to working in the office, but also to working at home, including fostering a sense of community and belonging. I am fully supportive of the hybrid approach.

**Mr Hollobone:** Figures released in April showed that 43% of staff in the Department were working on departmental premises. Can the Secretary of State tell me what proportion of staff in her Department were working from home before the pandemic; what the proportion is now; and what steps she is taking with the Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency to encourage more civil servants to work in the Department?

**Ms Dorries:** Before covid-19, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport followed a "smarter working" operating model where occasional working from home was an option. This enabled us to reduce our desk capacity to save money, and, typically, we expected about 40% of staff to be working from home, or from another location, on any given day. Since covid regulations were relaxed, staff in my Department have been returning to the office as part of a hybrid working operating model, with an expectation of some working from home. As I said, we have 800 desks for 2,000—well, 2,180—staff in our London office. The occupancy levels continue to increase, with an almost 80% occupancy on some days, but those figures are of the capacity that we have available to actually sit staff down in the Department. Due to our desk ratio, we now expect about 60% of our London-based staff to be working from home, or from another location, such as Manchester, on any given day.

#### Privatisation of Channel 4

7. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What discussions she has had with industry stakeholders on the Government's proposals to privatise Channel 4. [900244]

**The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure (Julia Lopez):** The Government consulted extensively on the future of Channel 4, and the views from a broad range of industry stakeholders informed our policymaking and final decision. As a Scottish MP, the hon. Member may be particularly interested to know that I met STV and MG Alba about the broadcasting White Paper, which included the proposal to privatise Channel 4. My officials also recently met representatives from the Scotland Office and the Scottish Government. We are at a unique turning point in public service broadcasting. We think we have the chance to make Channel 4 bigger and better, while preserving what makes it so special.

**Peter Grant:** When the Secretary of State was asked by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee why she wanted to privatise Channel 4, she said that it was because it was costing the taxpayer too much in subsidies. I think she was the only person in the room who was labouring under that particular delusion. Given that that excuse has gone, is it not time to come clean and say that the Secretary of State's mission against Channel 4 is to do not with making it a better broadcaster, but with trying to shut down a broadcaster that has a nasty habit of broadcasting the truth, in particular truths that the Secretary of State might prefer not to be made known?

**Julia Lopez:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, but I know the Secretary of State's reasoning for this decision better than he does. He also mischaracterises what was said at the Select Committee. He will be aware that Channel 4 is uniquely dependent on linear advertising, that it cannot own its own content, and that its borrowing sits on the public balance sheet. We think we have an opportunity to free it from some of those constraints to allow it to invest more in content to get private sector capital into the business, and we think that that will help to grow Channel 4, so that it can invest more in the businesses that he purports to care about.

**Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con):** The Secretary of State said that she wanted to remove the straitjacket from Channel 4. Except for the opportunity to borrow, which I did not know Channel 4 had asked for, the only straitjacket is the public service remits. Will those be reduced in any way?

Can the Minister kindly tell the House why the aim to compete with Amazon and Netflix should be one of the purposes of Channel 4, especially if either Netflix or Amazon, or a similar-sized foreign-owned organisation, might buy Channel 4?

**Julia Lopez:** This is not necessarily about allowing Channel 4 to compete in exactly the same way as Netflix and Amazon; it is about understanding the changing market dynamics that those companies are creating. As I said in my previous answer, Channel 4 is uniquely constrained. Its borrowing would sit on the public balance sheet, but it also cannot own its content. We believe that in today's market, it needs to be able to own its content in order to have much greater flexibility in how it runs its business, and getting private capital into the business would help it to do that. While people can bury their heads in the sand about the fundamental dynamics in the market, we are taking some difficult decisions, which we think are the right decisions to secure not only the future of the business, but the future of the kind of content that audiences in this country love.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I call the shadow Secretary of State, Lucy Powell.

**Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op):** Yet again, the Secretary of State fails to come to the Dispatch Box herself to defend one of her own flagship policies, despite publishing a media White Paper and the Government consultation and tweeting over recess that she was selling Channel 4 off without coming to this place. Perhaps the Minister can clear up some of the

confusions about the level of support for the Government's plans. Despite the impression the Secretary of State gave at her recent Select Committee hearing, is it not the case that according to the Government's own report, even when the 38 Degrees responses are removed, only 5% of respondents agreed that Channel 4 should be privatised? What is more, the majority of stakeholders are also against the sell-off. So can the Minister tell us who, apart from a small coterie around the Prime Minister, actually supports their plans?

**Julia Lopez:** I think the hon. Lady has been living in a different world. Only last week or the week before, the Secretary of State was grilled for three hours in Select Committee and took endless questions on Channel 4's future, and—[*Interruption.*] I have to answer the questions that are put to me. We do not have advance sight of which ones the hon. Lady will come on to. I will simply say that the fundamental facts of the market dynamics that I have set out remain. In the consultation that she cites, a huge number of responses were to the 38 Degrees redrawing of the questions we set. We have the responsibility as a Government to look at the long-term trends in this business and to make a decision about what is best for the business, for the taxpayer and for UK audiences and creative industries. That is the sole thing driving the decisions we make in this space.

**Lucy Powell:** Sorry, but I thought it was Ministers who decided which questions they responded to, not the other way around. It was their decision to do it this way. [*Interruption.*] The question about Channel 4 is on the Order Paper.

Is it not the truth that the Secretary of State made up her mind long, long ago, based not on the evidence or the responses, but on her own ideology and a petty vendetta against Channel 4's news coverage? The evidence is compelling: privatisation is bad for levelling up, bad for the skills pipeline, bad for the independent production sector and bad for our world-beating creative industries. Just like the forthcoming BBC licence review, is not this process just a sham? She does not listen to evidence, the industry, the public or many of her own Back-Benchers. Why does she not drop the ideology, support British jobs and British broadcasting, and stop the sell-off?

**Julia Lopez:** I would simply say that that is not the truth. This is not a decision driven by ideology; it is about what is best for our creative sector, what is best for audiences and what is best for the taxpayer. I am sure the hon. Lady will have plenty of opportunities to have ding-dongs with the Secretary of State on those issues in the forthcoming media Bill debate.

### Commonwealth Games

8. **Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to support the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

[900246]

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries) rose—**

**Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op):** Oh, there she is!

**Ms Dorries:** I am here. We are investing almost £600 million in Birmingham and the west midlands for the 2022 Commonwealth games, which will deliver a world-class event and provide a wide range of services, including safety and security, health services, traffic management, visas, customs and inspection provisions, creating 30,000 games-time employment opportunities in the process. We are working hard to ensure that the games leave a lasting legacy for the city, the region and the country.

**Mr Mohindra:** In this platinum jubilee year, the Birmingham Commonwealth games will give us the perfect opportunity to celebrate Her Majesty's enduring and dutiful commitment throughout her reign to maintaining relationships throughout the Commonwealth. I have had first-hand experience of that through my work with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Commonwealth games will give us a global stage to remind our friends and allies of the continued importance of strong relationships between like-minded nations?

**Ms Dorries:** That is a very good point and reiterates what I said earlier. This is the year of the Queen's platinum jubilee as well as of the Commonwealth games and the women's Euro 2022. It is a year for the whole of the UK to come together to celebrate everything that the UK has to offer and to enjoy events such as the Commonwealth games. In this year of all years, at such a difficult time in the world, upholding the Commonwealth's shared values, the development of free and democratic societies and the promotion of peace and prosperity are more important than ever.

### Topical Questions

T2. [900254] **Rob Roberts** (Delyn) (Ind): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries):** My Department has a wide-ranging and comprehensive legislative programme announced as part of the Queen's Speech. The Online Safety Bill and the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill are making great progress on digital connectivity across the UK. Our data reform Bill will reduce the burdens on scientists and businesses and will truly take advantage of Brexit. Our draft digital markets Bill will rebalance power from big tech to business and consumers and we will shortly set out our plans to legislate for an independent regulator of English football. We will boost our public service broadcasters through our upcoming media Bill.

I am also planning to announce today that we will publish the terms of reference for the BBC mid-term charter review, setting out our plans to review the governance and regulation of the BBC.

**Rob Roberts:** The House of Commons Library confirms that the majority of my Delyn constituency is in the worst 30% for connectivity in the UK, with more than 10% of my constituents still receiving less than 10 megabits per second broadband speeds. It is not a devolved matter and should be delivered by DCMS, so I hope that my right hon. Friend can confirm what the UK Government specifically are doing to help my constituents out.

**Ms Dorries:** Responses to the recent Welsh market review are being assessed to determine which premises require Government subsidy through Project Gigabit. We will then work out with the Welsh Government how to provide gigabit coverage to as many premises as possible. Further support is available through our gigabit broadband voucher scheme and those unable to access at least 10 megabits per second may be able to request an upgrade through the universal service obligation. As of January, Ofcom reported that 0.3% of premises in Delyn may be eligible for a broadband universal service obligation connection.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I congratulate St Johnstone on their emphatic premiership play-off win last week and wish Scotland good luck next week against Ukraine, for if we win we will move on to Wales the following weekend when we will surely cuff them. That game next week, which I am sure you are looking forward to, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be broadcast live on Sky Sports. With the awarding of Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish TV rights to Premier Sports and Viaplay, Scottish fans will have to subscribe to four different platforms to follow the game. England fans are able to watch their men's national team free to air through ITV and now Channel 4. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how we can address this inequity without harming Scottish football's financial situation?

**Ms Dorries:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. The Minister for Sport, the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), and, I think, probably the Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure would be happy to meet him to discuss that. As the hon. Gentleman may know, the broadcasting White Paper has just been published and the media Bill is coming forward shortly. I am sure his comments can be considered, and he may want to contribute to the process.

T3. [900255] **Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): How can my right hon. Friend ensure the availability of sufficient clean spectrum for programme making and special events, or PMSE, after 2030 to support the use of radio microphones in our vibrant entertainment and film industry?

**The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure (Julia Lopez):** We are in regular contact with Ofcom and the radio industry on these issues, and I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the matter further, so that I understand the interest driving his question.

T4. [900256] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Further to the comments made by the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), 96% of the people who responded to the Channel 4 consultation did not support privatisation. Having worked directly in the independent sector with a Channel 4-backed project, I saw for myself the importance of the drive that Channel 4 brings to that particular market, which is vital to our economy. There is no support in the creative sector for privatising Channel 4. Can the Government please explain why they are not paying attention and are determined to privatise Channel 4?



**Ms Dorries:** Some 53% of people in a public poll actually thought that Channel 4 was already privately owned. They did not realise—[*Interruption.*] As my hon. Friend the Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure has already said, we have to address a rapidly changing broadcasting landscape in the UK at the moment. It is a bad business model for any organisation to depend on one form of revenue. As we know, linear advertising is decreasing and Channel 4 is dependent on that advertising. It is a decision we have to take for the benefit of Channel 4. As I have already said, Channel 4 itself—[*Interruption.*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. Stop shouting at the Secretary of State, because we cannot hear her answer these important questions.

**Ms Dorries:** As Channel 4 highlighted in its own document, “4: The Next Episode”, it wants to raise investment and invest in more content, and we are setting Channel 4 free to be able to do that. If Channel 4 does that while state-owned, it is offset against the public balance sheet. We cannot allow that, because Governments do not own money—we only have taxpayers’ money—so we have to enable Channel 4 to be set free to raise investment and to continue to make the amazing and distinctive British content and edgy, diverse programmes that it does.

T5. [900257] **Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): I welcome the Government’s intention to strengthen the protections for legitimate journalism in the Online Safety Bill, but can my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say when those clauses will be brought forward? Will she extend them to cover specialist publications?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Chris Philp):** I thank my right hon. Friend for his question and his long-standing interest in this area. Clause 50 of the Online Safety Bill already exempts recognised news publishers from the provisions of the Bill, and in clause 16 there are particular protections for content of journalistic importance. As we committed on Second Reading, I think in response to one of his interventions, we will be looking to go further to provide a right of appeal in relation to journalistic content. Work is going on to deliver that commitment right now, and we will bring forward further news as soon as possible. I will make sure that my right hon. Friend is the first to hear about it.

T6. [900259] **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): The Government claim that protecting children online is key to the Online Safety Bill, yet we now know that the issue of breadcrumbing, whereby abusers move children from one platform to another to cause them harm, is sadly extremely widespread. Can the Secretary of State explain exactly how the Government, through the Online Safety Bill in its current form, will prevent this vile abuse from continuing?

**Ms Dorries:** We have targeted in the Online Safety Bill the platforms that create the most harm and where the most harm happens. We have done that in consultation with a number of stakeholders, including the Children’s Commissioner, but we do understand the problem that the hon. Member talks about. The Under-Secretary of

State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), is taking the Bill through Committee. We are looking at other platforms where harm exists and the practices that the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) talks about. What I will say is that the Online Safety Bill cannot fix absolutely everything on the internet—we cannot fix the internet, but we can do as much as possible within that Bill to reduce as much harm as possible, because keeping children safe is at the heart of the Bill and is the core principle that runs through it. We are open to discussions about anything we can do to improve the Bill, but we think we have gone as far as we can in protecting freedoms of speech and democratic content and protecting children, who are the most important part of the Bill. I am sure my hon. Friend will have discussions with the hon. Member.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Like the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), I have worked in the broadcast industry. Subject to certain conditions, I support the sale of Channel 4. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that any sell-off will be subject to requirements to make minimum British content, news content and the innovative programming that we so much enjoy on that station?

**Ms Dorries:** I thank my hon. Friend for enabling me to lay out some important points. Channel 4 is being sold as a public service broadcaster and the criteria that he has outlined will absolutely be in there. If anybody cares to read the broadcasting White Paper, we have put a number of things into the media Bill—not just the sale of Channel 4—that will help Channel 4, including provisions on prominence and the introduction of a code that will put all public service broadcasters and streamers on a level playing field in terms of what they can broadcast in the UK. It will be sold as a public service broadcaster and there will be a requirement to continue to make distinctive British content, such as “Derry Girls”, “Gogglebox” and all those programmes that are distinctly British. There will be a requirement to do that, as well as what he has listed.

T7. [900260] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): I put on record my best wishes to the two opposing sides around my constituency, the men’s and women’s teams of Newcastle United and Sunderland AFC, on a successful season for all involved. To stay on football, I and many of my constituents are disappointed that the north-east has not been selected to host any games in the upcoming 2022 women’s Euros and the closest game will take place more than 120 miles away in Rotherham. Can the Secretary of State tell the House why the north-east will not be home to any of the games? What benefits will people from Jarrow and the north-east gain from that highly anticipated football tournament?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston):** There is always overwhelming demand from our fantastic sports facilities around the country to host those amazing events. That is why we are aggressively pursuing many international and other sporting events so we can make sure that the love is spread across the whole country. I am sorry that the hon. Lady is disappointed on this occasion. Those decisions are not made directly by Government, but we work with all the organising authorities

to try to ensure that we level up sporting opportunities across the country. I am happy to speak to her about future opportunities.

## ATTORNEY GENERAL

*The Attorney General was asked—*

### CPS: London North

1. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the performance of the CPS in London North. [900261]

**The Attorney General (Suella Braverman):** Before I answer my hon. Friend, I inform the House that my friend and close partner, the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, is in the Gallery. It gives me great pleasure to welcome her to London to watch Attorney General questions this morning. I recently visited Ukraine to witness first hand the indomitable and inspiring work that she is leading in Ukraine to bring to justice those Russian soldiers suspected of war crimes. The UK is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with our friends in Ukraine. Slava Ukraini.

The Government are, of course, committed to holding the criminal justice system to account for its performance, which is why we are now publishing criminal justice scorecards that focus on regional performance, which make a crucial contribution to our understanding of how the system is working. CPS London prosecuted nearly 39,000 cases in 2021, with almost 29,000—74%—ending in a conviction. That is a 15.2% increase from 2020. The inspectorate recently completed an inspection of CPS London North and I am pleased to report that it found commendable improvements in the prosecution of rape and serious sexual offences.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** The whole House joins the Attorney General in welcoming our colleagues from Ukraine.

**Bob Blackman:** I associate myself with the Attorney General's remarks to our friends from Ukraine.

Clearly, one of the most important aspects of CPS performance is how it deals with witnesses and victims, particularly of violent crimes. Can she update the House on how CPS London North has performed against those criteria?

**The Attorney General:** I was pleased that the inspectorate report that looked specifically at performance in CPS London North found that 81.3% of responses to witnesses fully met the standard for being timely and effective. There is always more we can do and I know that the CPS is committed to improving the quality of its communication with victims. I would say, however, that CPS London North was also successful in securing convictions very recently for serious offences and we should record our thanks and gratitude to its team of prosecutors.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am a co-chair of the all-party group on miscarriages of justice, and we are all conscious that we want the Crown Prosecution Service to be as good as it possibly can be. However, up and down the country—in London and

elsewhere—there are serious worries about recruitment and the performance of many members of staff. Could there be a thorough look at the performance of the CPS at the moment?

**The Attorney General:** I regularly visit CPS teams around the country, and there is a huge amount of dedication and commitment to improving performance. No one is under any illusion about the scale of improvement needed. However, we are seeing huge measures, with investment and resources being ploughed into the system nationwide—whether that is Operation Soteria, or the pilots in the south-east and in Avon and Somerset. All around the country, we are seeing better practices, focusing on closer collaboration between the police and the prosecutor, earlier investigative advice and more support for victims. We now have some changes to the disclosure guidelines, which are going to focus on supporting victims. I think that, cumulatively, we are going to see improvements and the early data gives me grounds for optimism.

### Violence against Women and Girls: Prosecutions

2. **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase the number of prosecutions relating to violence against women and girls. [900262]

3. **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase the number of prosecutions relating to violence against women and girls. [900263]

11. **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase the number of prosecutions relating to violence against women and girls. [900271]

**The Attorney General (Suella Braverman):** I have seen at first hand the horrendous damage that these crimes do to victims, particularly when I was honoured to visit the Havens, which is a sexual assault referral centre, and that is why tackling violence against women and girls is a central mission of this Government. Supporting victims from the report to the police right through to trial and sentencing is a service that all victims deserve. I am working very closely with the Lord Chancellor and the Home Secretary so that we get a whole-system response to this challenge. I am very pleased to see that there has been a notable change in the volume of prosecutions, which has increased by more than 10% from quarter 2 to quarter 3 in 2021-22.

**Kate Osborne:** I thank the Attorney General for her response. In 2020, one in 20 victims of sexual assault reported being drugged or spiked by the perpetrator responsible for their assault, and that was before the terrifying reports last year of young women being injected. Given the scale and seriousness of this spiking epidemic, does the Attorney General regard it as acceptable that just 102 people were convicted for spiking offences in the whole of 2021? What more is being done to tackle this?

**The Attorney General:** I know that the Home Office is looking very closely at the issue of spiking. There will be movement on this because we take it very seriously, and we are very concerned about the increasing number of incidents relating to the spiking of victims as a way

of attacking and sexually assaulting them. In the data we are beginning to see on how the system is responding—whether that is the number of referrals the police are making to the CPS, the number of charges that the CPS is passing on to trial and for prosecution, or the actual conviction rate—we are seeing improvements. We want to go further, of course, but we are seeing early signs of improvement.

**Ruth Cadbury:** The Attorney General rightly talked about a whole-system approach, but over the past year I have seen an increasing number of extremely concerning cases involving domestic violence in which, specifically, the CPS, the probation service, the courts and the police all seem to be operating in silos when trying to protect women from abusive ex-partners who continue to abuse and harass them. What is the Attorney General doing to ensure that the various parts of the criminal justice system work together to increase prosecutions and protect these women?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Member is absolutely right that a whole-system approach is required. That is why the end-to-end rape review was announced last year and we have seen updates on how particularly the CPS is doing in relation to its responsibilities. The CPS recently published a rape strategy and the update to that, which sets out the improvements it has continued to see in every aspect of how it is managing rape prosecutions: better collaboration, as I mentioned; supporting more specialist units; and ensuring more support is given to victims. But I would just gently say that the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which I was proud to support as a great initiative by this Government, set out provisions to increase the sentences to be served by rapists and others convicted of sexual assault and I am only sorry that Labour voted against those measures.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** We will have to go a little faster. I appreciate that the Attorney General has complicated questions to answer, but we have a lot of business ahead of us today. We are supposed to have only another five minutes. We will obviously take longer, but can we go a little faster—short questions, short answers?

**Andrew Gwynne:** I am sure the Attorney General will have read the damning conclusions, and indeed the horrendous case studies, set out in last month's joint inspectorate report into post-charge handling of rape cases. Does she accept the report's findings when it comes to the way the system is failing survivors of rape and will she give us both a commitment and a timetable to implement its recommendations?

**The Attorney General:** We are of course always concerned about the need for more improvement and no one is denying that challenge. However, the CPS is committed to driving up the number of rape prosecutions and I am pleased with the green shoots of progress, which is notable from the recent data. If we compare performance —[*Interruption.*] This is not to be dismissed or laughed at. Since quarter 4 of 2018, the volume of CPS rape charges has increased by 24%. We have also seen that the rape conviction rate is 70%. Those are grounds for optimism. I do not deny that there is more to do, but we are seeing movement in the right direction.

**Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con):** Nowhere is there worse violence being committed against women and girls than that by Russian soldiers in Ukraine. Can the Attorney General assure the House that she will give every assistance to the Ukrainian prosecuting authorities to ensure that prosecutions will one day take place?

**The Attorney General:** I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that important issue. That is exactly the subject for discussion today and tomorrow with my friend the Ukrainian Prosecutor General, who has come to London at my invitation. I was honoured to go to Ukraine to see at first hand some of her work. What is remarkable about the leadership and fortitude the Ukrainian Prosecutor General is demonstrating is that she has already brought and led some charges and prosecutions of Russian suspects and one Russian soldier has already been sentenced for a war crime. That is remarkable, given the circumstances in which she and the Ukrainians are working.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** In England, modern slavery victims are helped by victim navigators to get the criminals to trial. Unfortunately in Wales, in the last seven years, there have only been two successful prosecutions under modern slavery legislation where people have been put in prison. Will the Attorney General look at expanding the victim navigator scheme to Wales in association with the great charity Justice and Care?

**The Attorney General:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. He is a doughty campaigner on this subject and I commit to looking more into what can be done.

**Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab):** May I add my welcome to our friends from Ukraine?

In January, the Attorney General told the House:

“This Government take tackling domestic abuse and hate crime extremely seriously”.—[*Official Report*, 6 January 2022; Vol. 706, c. 142.]

Why, therefore, has she spent the months since then taking the BBC through the High Court to protect an MI5 informant who attacked one partner with a machete and another partner predicted will kill a woman if he is not challenged and exposed? One of his victims is now taking her case to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, but does this not demand a fuller investigation? Rather than disregard the interests of domestic violence victims where the security services are involved, will the Attorney General support an inquiry by the Intelligence and Security Committee into the handling of this case and whether it raises wider concerns that agents are able to use their status to evade criminal responsibility?

**The Attorney General:** Of course, any allegation of domestic abuse or sexual assault on victims is horrendous. On no account does anyone in this Government condone that behaviour. I was very pleased with the result at court of our application for an injunction, because there are national security interests, and it is vital that those are balanced in any matter.

The Government are taking huge steps to support victims of domestic abuse. We passed a landmark piece of legislation, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which brought in key measures, key duties and investment to



support those who are victims of this heinous crime. I hope the Labour party will get behind that ongoing work.

### Serious Economic Crime

**4. Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland) (Con): What assessment she has made of the Serious Fraud Office's ability to tackle serious economic crime in 2022-23. [900264]

**6. James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): What assessment she has made of the Serious Fraud Office's ability to tackle serious economic crime in 2022-23. [900266]

**The Solicitor General (Alex Chalk):** In the past five years, the Serious Fraud Office has secured reparations for criminal behaviour from organisations it has investigated totalling over £1.3 billion. That sum is over and above the cost of running the SFO itself. In addition to recent convictions leading to fines and confiscation orders totalling more than £100 million, just this week Glencore Energy has indicated that it intends to plead guilty to seven bribery counts brought by the SFO in relation to its oil operations in Africa.

**Jerome Mayhew:** Serious fraud is too often conducted by the powerful and the rich, which makes it hard to investigate, difficult and complex. That is equally the reason why we must focus on this area above all to demonstrate equality before the law. Will my hon. and learned Friend say how many fraud trials the SFO will conduct this year, and the estimated value of those fraud cases? Does he have a plan to increase that number?

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We cannot have a situation where, just because the fraud is complex, it is beyond the reach of the law. That is why I am pleased that this year the SFO is taking forward seven prosecutions involving 20 defendants on a total of 80 counts, comprising alleged fraud valued at over £500 million. The alleged frauds include investment fraud, fraudulent trading and money laundering.

**James Sunderland:** The Solicitor General will be aware that the Serious Fraud Office has recently suffered a series of humiliating defeats in the courts and received heavy criticism from judges, not least in the ENRC case last week, in which the High Court criticised a former SFO director for

“gross and deliberate breach of duty”.

Given that the taxpayer now faces a significant bill, will my hon. and learned Friend ensure that the report commissioned from Sir David Calvert-Smith is published in full so that this House can consider his recommendations?

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend has raised two points: ENRC and the Sir David Calvert-Smith review. Those are, of course, separate matters, because the Unaoil matter is distinct. In respect of ENRC's civil case against the SFO, it is important to note that the judge found against ENRC on the overwhelming majority of its allegations against the SFO. My hon. Friend is correct about the review being led by Sir David Calvert-Smith, which is focusing on the findings of the Court of Appeal in the Unaoil case. The Attorney General has committed to publishing the findings of the review, and I am happy to restate that commitment today.

**Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab): Since 2016, the Serious Fraud Office has convicted just five fraudulent companies, but it has negotiated deferred prosecution settlements with another 11. Does the Solicitor General share my concern that when the SFO detects corporate fraud, its instinct is to negotiate instead of prosecuting and convicting those responsible?

**The Solicitor General:** The hon. Lady is right that it is always important to be vigilant about the point she raises, but I would make two points. First, in looking at the deferred prosecution agreements, we should just consider what has been achieved over the past five years: £1.3 billion has been taken off companies that have acted in a fraudulent way, in agreements sanctioned by the courts. As I have indicated, this year there will be seven trials in respect of 20 defendants on 80 counts, in respect of fraud worth more than £500 million. It is good news that just this week, Glencore has indicated that it will plead guilty to serious fraud, and it will be sentenced accordingly.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I call the Chairman of the Select Committee, Sir Robert Neill.

**Sir Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): May I, on behalf of my fellow members of the Justice Committee, echo the welcome that has been given to the Prosecutor General for Ukraine?

The prosecution of serious fraud has had significant success and I am glad that the Solicitor General recognises that. I have written to him in relation to the Calvert-Smith report, as many of us believe that confidence in the system demands full publication. Will he commit to looking earnestly and carefully at the concerns about gaps in substantive criminal law which sometimes create greater challenges for prosecutors in corporate fraud cases, for example the test in relation to corporate liability in criminal cases and whether there is a case for a duty to prevent, as is the case in other common law jurisdictions?

**The Solicitor General:** As always, my hon. Friend makes an absolutely critical point. Yes, there are convictions taking place. We can talk about Glencore, Petrofac and others, but he is absolutely correct that we must consider whether the law is there to meet the changing circumstances. The point he makes about corporate criminal liability is one that we are looking at very closely, not least in light of the Law Commission's conclusions. If there are gaps in the law, we will fill them.

### Stalking and Coercive Behaviour

**5. James Grundy** (Leigh) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the CPS's ability to effectively prosecute cases of (a) stalking and (b) coercive behaviour. [900265]

**The Solicitor General (Alex Chalk):** Stalking and coercive and controlling behaviour are serious crimes which disproportionately harm women. Prosecutions for both have increased in the years since the offences were created. In the case of coercive and controlling behaviour, they have risen from just five in 2015 to 1,403 in 2020-21. I am pleased to say that the conviction rate for domestic abuse cases in the last quarter for which data is available was 76%.



**James Grundy:** The Government first legislated to deal with stalking and coercive behaviour in 2012 and 2015 respectively. Can my hon. and learned Friend assure me that the Government will continue to prioritise tackling violence against women and girls?

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend is right. Those are just two elements of violence against women and girls. I am pleased that in the last decade the Government have: outlawed upskirting; criminalised sending revenge porn images; created a standalone offence of non-fatal strangulation; passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015; introduced the Domestic Abuse Act 2021; banned virginity testing and hymenoplasty; and reversed the decision to automatically release sexual offenders at the halfway point of their sentences. Those who commit crimes against women should expect condign punishment.

### Northern Ireland Protocol

7. **Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): What recent advice she has received on the legality of the Government's plans to amend primary legislation to adjust elements of the Northern Ireland protocol. [900267]

**The Attorney General (Suella Braverman):** I cannot comment specifically on any advice that I may or may not have received. It is not uncommon or inappropriate for Law Officers to seek advice, both from their officials and external specialist counsel. The Foreign Secretary's statement to the House last week set out the Government's proposals. She will be introducing primary legislation to address elements of the Northern Ireland protocol. I refer the hon. Member to that statement.

**Ian Paisley:** I thank the Attorney General and I appreciate the constraints within which she has to work on this matter. The Government are, of course, well within their rights to bring forward legislation to protect the integrity of the United Kingdom's single economic market and protect the Union. Will the Attorney General take the opportunity today, from the Dispatch Box, to spell out to the misinformed US Congress delegation visiting Northern Ireland that defending, upholding and protecting the Union is consistent with the New Decade, New Approach agreement and consistent with the Belfast agreement? Will the Government move expeditiously—that is, before the summer recess—on bringing forward legislation?

**The Attorney General:** The Bill that is proposed will take vital steps to protect the integrity of the United Kingdom, our precious Union, and protect peace, which is cemented by the Belfast agreement. It will include provisions which will ensure the security of the common travel area, the single electricity market and north-south co-operation. It will propose that goods moving and staying within the UK are freed of unnecessary bureaucracy through our new green channel, underpinned by data-sharing arrangements, including a trusted trader scheme, to provide the EU with real-time commercial data. All those measures are consistent with the Belfast agreement and consistent with Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom. I urge all Members here and parliamentarians abroad to support them.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): The Attorney General said again today that there is a long-standing convention that prevents her from discussing either the fact or the content of her legal advice on the Northern Ireland protocol, which makes it all the more remarkable that, on Wednesday 11 May, *The Times* newspaper and BBC "Newsnight" not only disclosed the fact of her legal advice, but actually quoted from its contents. Let me ask her a very straightforward question that requires only a yes or no answer: did she personally authorise the briefings to *The Times* and "Newsnight" regarding her advice on the protocol—yes or no?

**The Attorney General:** I take the convention incredibly seriously; it is a running thread through the integrity, robustness and frankness with which Law Officers can provide advice. I do not comment on media speculation, and that is the Government's line. [Interruption.] The measures proposed there are to protect peace in Northern Ireland, to protect the Belfast agreement and to protect our precious United Kingdom—[Interruption.]

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. The question has been asked. It is simply not right for the—[Interruption.] The Attorney General is on her feet uttering words. If the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) is not happy with the answer, that is a different matter. It is not correct for her to sit there shouting. [Interruption.] No, that is it. The right hon. Lady has asked the question and the Attorney General is giving her response.

**The Attorney General:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I take the Law Officers' convention incredibly seriously and I do not comment on media speculation. That is a firm position of the Government. There are big differences between the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) and myself, and I am very disappointed at her line of attack. [Interruption.] I love the United Kingdom; the right hon. Lady is embarrassed by our flag. I am proud of the leadership that the United Kingdom has demonstrated; she wants us to be run by Brussels and wants to scrap Trident. My heroes are Churchill and Thatcher; hers are Lenin and Corbyn. [Interruption.] When it comes to UK leadership in the world, Labour does not have a clue—[Interruption.]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. We will stick to the specific subject of the question. If the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury is not satisfied with the answer, that is another matter. She will have to come back and ask it again another time.

**Emily Thornberry:** May I raise a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** No, I cannot take a point of order in the middle of questions.

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): The Attorney General's advice to the Prime Minister was reported to have said that the Good Friday agreement takes "primordial significance" over the Northern Ireland protocol. Does she accept that the Good Friday agreement

sits alongside other agreements, rather than takes precedence, and that it should not be used as a basis to walk away from the deal that the UK Government signed? Will she commit to publishing the legal advice in full?

**The Attorney General:** I will not repeat my answer, but we do not comment on media speculation and I respect and take incredibly seriously the Law Officers'

convention. The Foreign Secretary has made it clear that the Government will publish a statement summarising their legal position shortly. We will not publish legal advice, if it has been given—the content or the fact of it—and our overriding responsibility is to the Belfast agreement and the peace process. The current arrangements with the EU are undermining this, which is why we have to act now.

## Evacuations from Afghanistan

10.44 am

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if she will make a statement on evacuations from Afghanistan.

**The Minister for Europe and North America (James Cleverly)**: The Government are grateful to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs for its inquiry and its detailed report. We will consider the report carefully and provide a written response within the timeline that the Committee has requested.

The scale of the crisis in Afghanistan last year is unprecedented in recent times. The report recognises that the Taliban took over the country at a pace that surprised the Taliban themselves, the international community and the former Government of Afghanistan. Many months of planning for an evacuation, and the enormous efforts of staff to deliver it, enabled us to evacuate more than 15,000 people within a fortnight, under exceptionally difficult circumstances. The Government could not have delivered an evacuation at that scale without planning, grip and leadership.

The evacuation involved the processing of details of thousands of individuals by Ministry of Defence, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Home Office staff in the UK and teams on the ground in Kabul. In anticipation of the situation, the FCDO had reserved the Baron hotel, so the UK was the only country apart from the United States to have a dedicated emergency handling centre for receiving and processing people in Kabul International airport. RAF flights airlifted people to a dedicated terminal in Dubai, reserved in advance by the FCDO, where evacuees were assessed by other cross-Government teams; they were then flown on FCDO-chartered flights to the UK, where they were received by staff of the Home Office and other Departments, who ensured that they were catered for and quarantined. The evacuation was carefully planned and tightly co-ordinated throughout its delivery.

As it does following all crises, the FCDO has conducted a thorough lessons learned exercise. We have written to the FAC with the main findings of that exercise. Changes have already been implemented by the FCDO, for example in response to the situation in Ukraine.

We all regret that we were not able to help more people who worked with us or for us to get out of Afghanistan during the military evacuation. Since the end of the formal evacuation last summer, we have helped a further 4,600 people to leave Afghanistan. We will continue to work to deliver on our commitment to those eligible for resettlement in the UK through the Afghan relocations and assistance policy and the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme.

**Mr Baron**: Last summer, Operation Pitting brought over 15,000 people to the UK from Afghanistan. We all commend those who were directly involved on the ground in that operation. However, the recent report by the Foreign Affairs Committee—whose Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), is sitting behind me—sets out that there was no comprehensive plan detailing who should come, how

many should come and in what order. Many people who should be in this country in safety are still in Afghanistan in fear for their lives.

A key example is British Council contractors. They did not work directly for the Government, or indeed for the British Council, but they still did their bit promoting the English language, British culture and British values; the Taliban do not see or recognise the difference. We have about 170 British Council contractors and their families in Afghanistan, of whom about half are deemed to be at very high risk, according to our own definition, and a further 93 or so are deemed to be at high risk. Many of them live in constant fear for their lives, moving from house to house as they are actively hunted by the Taliban.

I had a positive meeting with the Minister for Refugees last week, but we are coming up against constant FCDO red tape and bureaucracy, which is preventing the FCDO from immediately helping those who are in the greatest danger through the ACRS. It is bureaucracy at our end; we have identified the individuals who are in danger in Afghanistan.

As somebody who opposed the morphing of the mission into nation building in Afghanistan—I think I was the only Conservative to vote against it when we had the opportunity—I feel that the Government owe these people a debt of honour. There is an obligation to help them. I appreciated the Prime Minister's answer to my question yesterday, in which he said he would do something about the issue, but I have been raising it since November and they have been in danger since the fall of Kabul. What undertakings can the Government give that they will finally break the bureaucratic deadlock? Time is running out.

**James Cleverly**: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He has communicated to me directly his passion about this issue. I can assure him that the Government take extremely seriously their responsibility to those who worked directly, but also indirectly, with us and for us.

As I said, the ACRS was formally launched in January this year. The scheme resettled up to 20,000 Afghans, including those whom we know to be at particularly high risk of persecution by the Taliban, such as the British Council staff whom my hon. Friend mentioned, as well as female Afghan politicians, female judges and others who, during our presence in Afghanistan, attempted to promote the values about which we feel strongly. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are working, across Government, with Lord Harrington, the Minister who specialises in the resettlement process, to ensure that we can move as quickly as possible, while also ensuring at all times that we create a system that is legally robust, is right, and prioritises the people who are at risk and to whom we owe a debt of honour.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing)**: I call the shadow Minister.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The report of the Foreign Affairs Committee on the UK's botched evacuation from Afghanistan is one of the most damning reports that I have ever read. At a time when the UK can be proud of our support for the Ukrainian mission, this report drags us back to a dark period when we turned our back on our allies. It details

[Catherine West]

a disastrous tragedy of errors that fundamentally undermines the 20 years of progress that Britain and its allies helped to bring to the Afghan people.

When Kabul fell, political and senior leaders were all on holiday, despite repeated warnings from US intelligence agencies that the Taliban were in the ascendant. People who supported the allied mission or were especially vulnerable to the Taliban were left behind. Sensitive documents were abandoned in the embassy because the evacuation was rushed and under-rehearsed. There was no plan. Consular staff were withdrawn before replacements were ready to be deployed, which led to a crucial delay in processing cases. Visa schemes were led by three separate Government Departments, which utterly failed to co-ordinate, and—a year on—these problems endure, including the problem of the British Council staff. National security decisions were taken with potentially life-and-death consequences, with no clarity and with no record of which Ministers authorised what. As my hon. Friends the Members for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) made clear at the time, the Government were asleep at the wheel at this moment of acute crisis, putting British lives at risk to clean up their mess.

The effects on the UK's international standing are immensely damaging. Shaky senior leadership in Government not only had disastrous consequences in the short term, but has damaged the trust that others have in us in the long term. The lack of leadership and the repeated mistakes make a mockery of the notion of “global Britain”, betraying the good work of our armed services and diplomats and signalling a strategic incoherence at the heart of the Government's foreign policy.

I will be blunt in asking two questions of the Minister. First, who has been held accountable for the clear failures in our handling of a situation in which incompetence was promoted and negligence rewarded? Secondly, will the Government get a grip and commit themselves to working with the international community to ensure that there is a coherent strategy to engage with Afghanistan in the medium to long term? In the light of impending famine in the country, we cannot afford to turn our back on the Afghan people forever. The Government must make amends for this sorry episode, and improve.

**James Cleverly:** In my opening comments, I made the point that the Government had reserved the Baron hotel. Apart from the United States, we were the only country in the world to have that physical presence at the airport. We had made arrangements at Dubai to have an airhead there to facilitate the evacuation and onward passage. The report from the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), is an important document and we will pay it the attention it deserves and respond to it in the timescale requested of us by his Committee.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I call the Chairman of the Select Committee.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) for securing this urgent question.

The points he makes about the British Council are absolutely valid, and the Minister, whose integrity is beyond question, has made the defence that his Department would expect of him. May I, however, raise just a few points?

First, the reason we reserved the hotel and others did not was that the French and Germans had pulled their people out months earlier, and they had done so because the Americans had signalled the withdrawal 18 months earlier—or, if you thought that Vice-President Biden would become President Biden, 14 years earlier. This was not a surprise. The lack of a plan was a surprise. The failure to be present was a surprise.

The failure of integrity when discussing matters with the Select Committee was a huge surprise. For us, as representatives of the British people, the real surprise—the real tragedy—is not just the hundreds of lives left behind in Afghanistan and the people abandoned in neighbouring countries but the undermining of the security of this country and the defence of our people, which has come about through an erosion of trust. Our enemies do not fear us and allies do not trust us. That has been tested in Ukraine, and we are all paying for it in every gas bill and every food shop. That is the price of the erosion of trust, and that is why we need a fundamental rethink not just of our foreign policy but of how our country engages with the world. Those who, like our most senior diplomat, are the voice of our country in the world, need to be voices that we can trust, but I am afraid that the Committee that I am privileged to chair does not.

**James Cleverly:** My hon. Friend knows that when he speaks, he speaks with great authority and we listen carefully to what he says. If there are times when we disagree with him, we do so with genuine respect for his experience and knowledge. The report that his Committee has produced is important and will be considered fully and properly and responded to. He has my absolute guarantee on that, and he knows that that view is shared across the Department. Specifically with regard to the permanent under-secretary, the ministerial team has complete confidence in him. The lessons that we all need to learn will be learned. I give him that assurance from the Front Bench.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP): There is much talk about the implications for the reputation of the United Kingdom internationally after this failure. I am not much moved by the reputation of the United Kingdom, but I grieve for the poor souls left behind in mortal danger in Afghanistan. They have been left to their fate after putting their trust in this United Kingdom Government. The Government said that intensive planning went into the withdrawal, but that could well be because, unlike other nations, the UK was flat-footed in its preparedness, no doubt leading to that intensity. No amount of intensive planning is any substitute for strategic or timely planning.

Just last night I was in this place commending the Ministry of Defence and its Ministers for their strategic, timely and full response to war in Ukraine, so this is not political in any analysis, much less a comparative analysis. This operation was extremely challenged for want of timely leadership and grip. We on the SNP Benches are not confused: we know a deeply flawed operation when we see it, and likewise an incorrigible lack of leadership



and grip from the Prime Minister and the then Foreign Secretary. We need to be clear to the people outside that, while there were clearly severe and profound problems with Op Pitting in political and strategic terms, the operational performance and bravery of the servicemen and women working in exceptionally challenging circumstances to evacuate 15,000 terrified civilians was astonishing and a credit to their service and training. The work of the uniformed personnel is beyond reproach.

As I have said before in this place, there was clearly a failure to analyse or to act effectively on intelligence on the Taliban's force strength, and a failure to act decisively or timeously on the explicit US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, which was known in February 2020 at the very latest. Is the Minister aware that one in four people crossing the channel in the first quarter of 2022 was an Afghan refugee? If that does not cause the UK to dial down its vilification of these people, I do not know what will. Will he speak directly to that point, please?

**James Cleverly:** The UK Government's vilification is reserved exclusively for the evil people who prey on the vulnerable and traffic them through huge danger, putting lives at risk not just in the crossing between France and the UK but more widely. That is where our vilification rightly sits. The Foreign Affairs Committee's important report will be considered carefully. Lessons have already been learned and implemented in relation to our response on Ukraine, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned. We know we have to take this report seriously, and we will.

**Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I pay tribute to my former colleagues who worked on Operation Pitting, including Colonel Dave Middleton and my former boss Brigadier James Martin.

Looking at the report, does the Minister accept there are problems with how cross-Government integration works? Does he also accept that there are significant question marks about how our national security structures work, and whether they and the current National Security Adviser are fit for purpose?

**James Cleverly:** The situation in Afghanistan moved incredibly quickly, and it forced a pressure on all international capitals that had a presence in Afghanistan, the likes of which we had not seen before. I hear what my hon. Friend says about the specifics, and I will not be rushed into making conclusions about our response to the report. It deserves proper consideration, and that consideration will be given.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): May I return to the position of the British Council contractors—a point that was raised by the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron)? Having to move from place to place costs money, and we all know that these people are in fear of their life. What are the Government doing to support them with those costs? I know of individuals who are sending money, but are the Government doing so?

Secondly, it is all very well to say that people can be considered for the resettlement scheme if they make it out of Afghanistan, but we really owe a debt of honour to these individuals, so surely we can tell them that they will get a place on the scheme if they manage to get out.

**James Cleverly:** Our desire is to protect as many people as we can from persecution by the Taliban. It is not possible for us to give blanket assurances because, of course, each application has to be taken on its merits.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly draws the House's attention to the Afghan resettlement scheme, under which we have agreed to take 20,000 citizens from Afghanistan. We have rightly moved on to assisting Ukrainian refugees, but my understanding is that we still have 12,000 Afghan refugees living in hotels, without permanent or even temporary accommodation. Will he update the House on what we are doing to make sure that people for whom we have accepted responsibility have a permanent place to call home?

**James Cleverly:** My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. Although the eyes of the world have rightly moved to the appalling situation in Ukraine following Russia's unprovoked invasion of that wonderful country, I assure him that the Government remain committed to ensuring that we properly discharge our duty to those Afghans who worked with us, alongside us and for us in Afghanistan, including when they come to the UK.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on securing this important urgent question. It is not just British Council contractors whom we encouraged to be part of the nation building project; many female prosecutors and judges have been left behind. Along with Marzia Babakarkhail, a former Afghan judge living in the UK, I have been trying for some time to get the Government to take action to help these women, who are moving from house to house and relying on money that is being sent to them by friends here and elsewhere. Baroness Kennedy and the International Bar Association managed to get a significant number of female judges out of Afghanistan earlier this year, but many highly vulnerable women who worked as prosecutors and judges are still trapped in the country. Can the Minister give me a firm commitment that the British Government, who encouraged these women to take up roles in Afghanistan, will do something concrete to help them without further delay?

**James Cleverly:** Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon has put a particular focus on supporting women in the judiciary, and women judges and politicians, as we recognise that they are particularly at risk, both because they are women and because they sought to promote equality, human rights and the rule of law in that country. I assure the hon. and learned Lady that we will remain focused on protecting them.

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) makes exactly the point I want to make: we gave many people the opportunity of a new life in this country last summer, but they are languishing in bridging hotels across the country. It is impossible to get an update on how many have been resettled. They have not been resettled; they are in hotels, and they are not part of a community and are not being integrated. I urge the Minister to do everything he can to provide regular updates to MPs

[Lucy Allan]

who have bridging hotels in their constituencies, and to ensure that we properly integrate and resettle these Afghans whom we welcomed here.

**James Cleverly:** My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point, and I assure her that we will raise this issue with the Departments that are focused on the very point she has made.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): British citizens' relatives who are trapped in Afghanistan cannot apply for visas to come to the UK because no biometric service is available, and they have to have biometrics in order to apply for visas. For this reason, the requirement for biometrics has been suspended in the case of Ukraine, so will the Minister suspend it in the case of Afghanistan?

**James Cleverly:** I will raise this issue at the next opportunity in cross-government meetings on this.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that we left Afghanistan in such haste because our American allies decided unilaterally to leave at great speed, without sharing the timetable and plans with us, and that obviously meant we had to leave, because they had greatly superior forces? All those who did such a good job on the ground, under such time pressure, are therefore to be praised and thanked for what they managed to do.

**James Cleverly:** Our presence in Afghanistan was a coalition one; this was done in close co-ordination with our international allies. When the decision was made by the US to withdraw, it was inevitable that we would also have to withdraw. The pace of advance of the Taliban took everybody by surprise, and it forced the pace of evacuation, which we had not anticipated; we had made some preparations, but we had not anticipated it fully.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): My constituent queued for 20 hours to get into the Baron hotel; she was trying to protect her baby daughter from the Taliban, who were firing shots and using tear gas. She was evacuated, but her nightmare did not end there; her daughter's emergency passport has expired, and her brother languishes in a Greek camp, seriously ill. He was a supreme court judge and he faces certain death if he goes back to Afghanistan. When I raise these issues with the Home Office, I get no response whatsoever. Can we not do better?

**James Cleverly:** The hon. Lady highlights her constituent's situation; it is reflective of the difficult situation that many Afghans face. We were presented with a uniquely difficult set of circumstances, and we are working to ensure that we are able to provide support and homes for as many people as possible. We continue to work across Departments to facilitate that.

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland) (Con): While I am pleased that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has undertaken a review of the lessons learned in Afghanistan, I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for the tone and contents of his response to the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat).

Will my right hon. Friend set out how our diplomatic and operational response in Ukraine has already changed in response to the lessons learned in Afghanistan?

**James Cleverly:** My hon. Friend makes the point that although the Select Committee's report is important, and it will be read and assessed with seriousness, we did not want to wait before we made improvements, so we took lessons from our internal process. Some of those lessons have already been applied in Ukraine, and I strongly believe that has improved the response to the situation there. We will continue to learn lessons and to strive to improve our performance, not just in Ukraine and Afghanistan but in all circumstances in which an emergency response is needed.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): We had 18 months to prepare for the US withdrawal but, as the Select Committee's report exposes, the end to our mission was utterly chaotic, and many people to whom we owed a duty were left behind, abandoned, with their lives at immediate risk. Does the Minister not accept that this episode represents an appalling failure of planning by the Department's political leadership? When will someone in this Government do the right thing and take responsibility?

**James Cleverly:** The precise timing of the US departure from Afghanistan was not a date that was widely shared, and the pace of the Taliban's advance was not information that was widely known. We responded as promptly as we were able to. The professionalism of our public servants—both those in uniform and those out of uniform—was exemplary. We will of course learn lessons from that situation and, as I have said, some of them have already been applied. We will continue to ensure that we amend our processes and practices, so that if such a circumstance presented itself again, we would be able to respond better and faster.

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): There are still 80 cases of people in Luton North trying to get loved ones in Afghanistan to safety. I have previously raised in the Chamber the case of a woman doctor who led public campaigns on women's reproductive health and vaccination programmes, and whose estranged husband is now a member of the Taliban. In fact, Ministers and special advisers knew of her case when she was shamefully turned away from the Baron hotel. The Select Committee's report shows what we all knew: it was chaos, and there was no plan. When will the thousands of people who have been left behind, such as the doctor I mentioned and her children, be given some hope? When will individual cases be given a meaningful response?

**James Cleverly:** As I said, we envisage up to 20,000 Afghans being resettled under the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme. We will work through that. I am sure the hon. Lady will understand that I cannot comment on individual cases, but we will ensure that we discharge our duty to those Afghans who supported us when we were in that country.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My constituents and I continue to be in utter despair at the devastating lack of leadership last summer, which has been laid bare by the Select Committee's report. We are also concerned about the ongoing lack of response

to our emails and calls while the Taliban are advancing a reign of terror. This week, one of my constituents has told me about the Taliban visiting the family home and beating her mum and cousin because her mum worked in a women's charity that was supported by the UK Government. That is one of the cases that we sent to the special cases team last summer. Yes, we need to learn the lessons for Ukraine, but we also need to learn them for the people in Afghanistan who have been left behind. The Minister will have the support of the House in doing that.

Will the Minister make two swift changes? First, will he look to assess cases with the information that the Government already have? They can make a decision based on the information that is already there. Secondly, will he make life easier for those seeking to apply for visas for which they are eligible? The English language test that is needed cannot be done in Afghanistan; will he suspend that requirement for visa applications?

**James Cleverly:** The ACRS process is designed to be robust but effective. We have listened to the hon. Lady's suggestions, and I will ensure that my right hon. and hon. Friends who are involved have also taken note of the points she raised.

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** My constituent was in the Afghan special forces. She was a woman soldier supporting the west. She was evacuated in August 2021. Her 14-year-old sister is now with her in Bath. Her husband and her father were killed, and her mother, who lost a leg in a missile strike, did not make it to the airport. My constituent applied to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme for her mother to join her in Bath, but her application was rejected on the basis that her mother was not a dependant. The mother is highly vulnerable and alone. My constituent is deeply traumatised, and her mother's situation distresses her even more. Will the Minister please facilitate a meeting with me and a relevant Minister in the Ministry of Defence to discuss my constituent's case as a matter of urgency?

**James Cleverly:** Many Members are trying to help their constituents. We have a system in place, and I strongly urge the hon. Lady to use it, because that is the most effective way of getting this done.

**Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab):** Our presence ended in August 2021, but our commitment should not. We have seen the impact on women and girls, particularly in terms of access to education. Can the Minister outline what steps he has taken to ensure commitment in the medium and long term, and what action is being taken to review our foreign policy?

**James Cleverly:** As I said in my opening remarks, we will take the recommendations of the Foreign Affairs Committee very seriously. We have launched the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme, and we envisage that it will help up to 20,000 Afghans. The hon. Lady is right: our presence in Afghanistan is no longer physical, but we are absolutely committed to discharging our duty of honour to those Afghans who supported us, including women.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** The report of the Foreign Affairs Committee justifies our worst fears. It said that events could have been better

predicted, things could have been better planned for and people could have been protected. Many people in Afghanistan today were given the false hope that they would find safety here in the UK, particularly people from minoritised groups, such as the LGBT community and the Hazara Muslim community, who move from house to house in fear of attacks from the Taliban. What steps will this Government take to fulfil the commitment to those people and ensure that they can find a place of safety in the UK, and do not have to wait for the Government to make up their mind?

**James Cleverly:** The Government have made a commitment to prioritising those people particularly at risk from persecution by the Taliban. That includes women and girls, human rights defenders, people who promoted the rule of law, and those from minority communities, such as the Hazaras, whom the hon. Lady highlighted. As I said, the ACRS scheme envisages helping up to 20,000 Afghans, and prioritisation will be for those most at risk.

**Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab):** The report outlines a summer of chaos and it is absolutely shocking to read, but disappointingly, the chaos continues. I echo the concerns of other Members, as I, too, have so many constituents in danger in Afghanistan and in hotels here with no plan that they know of to move them. What is the plan?

I also wish to raise the issue of those who are in camps outside Afghanistan. A constituent in Roehampton wrote to me to say that his family had been evacuated by NATO from Afghanistan to a camp in Kosovo. He said that his sister-in-law had given birth to her baby there, and that he was really concerned about the family's situation. What meetings is the Minister holding with UNICEF to co-ordinate work to bring relatives from those camps to the UK?

**James Cleverly:** Our response to the situation in Afghanistan has always, by its nature, been international. We continue to work with our friends in other Governments and with non-governmental organisations around the world to support Afghans who have been displaced by this conflict.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I thank the Minister for his answers. The report makes for sober reading. One hundred and seventy families are still in Afghanistan. The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), who asked this urgent question, said that these people had worked with us. He said that their lives were at risk and that they were still waiting to be processed. Willowbrook Foods and Mash Direct in my constituency are able, willing and keen to offer employment and, in some cases, accommodation and help with accommodation. How does the Minister plan to get these people to safety, make right the fact that they still do not have the refugee that they were promised months ago, and enable companies in my constituency to help him and the Afghan people to get the new lives that they want?

**James Cleverly:** The generosity of the people of the United Kingdom is huge, and I think the example that the hon. Gentleman gives will be replicated in many constituencies around the country. We envisage the ACRS process helping Afghans to come to the UK, but



[James Cleverly]

as has been brought up by a number of right hon. and hon. Members, we also have a duty to help them to become integrated, educated and, ultimately, employed. That is the full duty we have and the full duty we seek to discharge.

## Business of the House

11.20 am

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

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mark Spencer):** It would be a pleasure.

The business for the week commencing 6 June will include:

MONDAY 6 JUNE—Second Reading of the National Security Bill.

TUESDAY 7 JUNE—Opposition day (1st allotted day). Debate on a motion in the name of the Official Opposition, subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 8 JUNE—Second Reading of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

THURSDAY 9 JUNE—General debate on social housing and building safety followed by a general debate on the Government's strategic priorities for OFWAT. The subject for the second debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 10 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 13 June will include:

MONDAY 13 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill.

TUESDAY 14 JUNE—Second Reading of the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 15 JUNE—Opposition day (2nd allotted day). Debate on a motion in the name of the Official Opposition, subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 16 JUNE—Business to be determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 17 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

Right hon. and hon. Members might also wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise for the summer recess at the close of business on Thursday 21 July and return on Monday 5 September. The House will rise for the conference recess at the close of business on Thursday 22 September and return on Monday 17 October. The House will rise for the November recess at the close of business on Wednesday 9 November and return on Monday 14 November. The House will rise for the Christmas recess at the close of business on Wednesday 21 December and return on Monday 9 January. The House will rise for the February recess at the close of business on Thursday 9 February and return on Monday 20 February. Sitting Fridays will be announced in due course. I hope that that information is welcome news to right hon. and hon. Members.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** I thank the Leader of the House for giving us not only the forthcoming business but the recess dates, for which members of staff have been asking me. I am very grateful: he went further even than I asked, so fair do's—Brucie bonus time!

I start, and I am sure the Leader of the House will join me, by wishing the Queen well on her platinum jubilee. I look forward to the Chamber commemorating that historic milestone later today. She has shown remarkable leadership and dedication to public service over 70 years.



I also invite the Leader of the House to join me in congratulating Labour's sister party in Australia on its positive campaign in the election down under. I am inspired by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's victory, ousting a stale Conservative Government who were out of touch and out of ideas.

Yesterday, the damning verdict on Downing Street's law-breaking parties was published. Can the Leader of the House say whether anyone in Government received a copy of Sue Gray's report in advance of its publication and whether they attempted to change it? Failures of leadership and judgment at the heart of Government are mentioned in the report, and it was particularly sickening to learn of the total lack of respect for and poor treatment of staff, with security staff being mocked and cleaners left to mop up. Will he clarify whether any of those who mocked staff are special advisers? If so, has the Prime Minister sacked them? If not, why not?

The report concludes that those at the top must bear responsibility for a culture that allowed such flagrant disregard for the rules. Yesterday, the Prime Minister seemed too busy focusing on saving his own skin to deal with the Tory cost of living crisis. He also said that all senior leadership in No. 10 has changed, which I found a little odd. Does he not count himself as senior leadership?

On the cost of living crisis, one in eight energy customers is already struggling to pay their bills, and that is before bills are expected to go up by a further £800 in October. We know that the Chancellor will make a statement shortly and we will of course scrutinise his proposals carefully, but why has it taken so long? It really does look as though the Government delayed their support for struggling families so that they could time the announcement as a distraction from the Sue Gray report. Every day, the Government have dragged their feet, as they continue to do, refusing to introduce Labour's windfall tax on oil and gas producers. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been added to the bills of households across the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you and I agree that it is important that Members are able to hold Ministers to account in this place first, yet it has been widely trailed in the media this morning that the Chancellor will be making the inevitable screeching U-turn that we all knew he would have to make eventually. Will the Leader of the House please remind his colleagues that major policy statements should be made by Ministers in this place first, not briefed to the media?

I am sorry to have to bring this up again, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I have cleared it with the Clerk, the Table Office, and the other Madam Deputy Speaker, the right hon. Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing). I want to make that clear. There have been allegations made about the Conservative party's failure to take proper action following allegations put to it about alleged child abuse by a parliamentary candidate. Will the Leader of the House now attempt to restore victims and survivors' faith in the Conservative party's safeguarding processes? He could do that now by committing to an independent inquiry into the party's handling of such issues.

Months ago, we were promised fresh data on response times to written parliamentary questions and ministerial replies to MPs' correspondence. I am glad to say that after pressure from those on the Opposition Benches, a written statement on the subject is on the Order Paper

today. However, it does not solve the problem of the long wait that Members' staff are experiencing, not only as regards Parliamentary questions but when calling MPs' hotlines, such as those in the Home Office. Constituency offices are even starting to receive significantly higher phone bills for the office as a result. Will the Leader of the House urge the Home Secretary, just as an example, to increase capacity for the hotline so that Members and our staff—it is usually our staff—can best support constituents, such as those constituents who cannot get passports not just for a well deserved holiday but for ID for a job or somewhere to live?

With a Government too busy plotting how they will get away with it, as cited in the Sue Gray report, rather than introducing a proper plan to deal with soaring inflation, falling wages and a stagnant economy, it is now time for Tory MPs to act and remove the Prime Minister, who has lost the confidence of the British people.

**Mark Spencer:** It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that you would be in Doncaster celebrating its city status, for which I know you have been campaigning for a long time.

I join the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) in celebrating the Queen's 70th jubilee. It will be a huge opportunity for the country to celebrate and get together to recognise a huge achievement in public service by Her Majesty. I also join her in congratulating the Australian Government on their success. We look forward to working with them on trade and international matters as we move forward.

We then got into the usual flurry of accusations and snipes. Of course, the hon. Lady started with the Sue Gray report. I am glad that Sue Gray has finally managed to get her report out there. It identifies the ongoing challenges in No. 10 but, as the Prime Ministers made clear, he has addressed the culture in No. 10 and changed the senior management team. I think he was also shocked, as many colleagues would be, by the treatment of security and cleaning staff. That is why yesterday the Prime Minister went around and apologised in person to those security and cleaning teams on behalf of those people who were rude to them. I think that was the right thing to do. The Prime Minister has made it clear that the culture has now changed within No. 10, and he is now focused on what matters to the British people: the global fight against inflation, Putin's invasion of Ukraine and making sure that our constituents' priorities are the Government's priorities, as they always have been.

The hon. Lady mentioned the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He will be here at this Dispatch Box very soon, and I will not pre-empt what he is about to say, for no other reason than that I do not know. I look forward to hearing what the Chancellor says. What I do know is that this Chancellor has already announced £22 billion-worth of support. He is a Chancellor who, instead of giving us knee-jerk reactions and political gimmicks, thinks through the economic and fiscal plans that he will bring forward and makes sure that in those plans he gives genuine support to those who need it, while not incentivising people away from making long-term investments to continue to pay the Exchequer the tax from their successful businesses. That is the appropriate thing to do.

[Mark Spencer]

The hon. Lady finished by mentioning parliamentary questions. Yesterday, I appeared in front of the Procedure Committee to answer questions. It is a challenge that I recognise; we need to do better. As a constituency MP, I understand that many across the House will certainly be frustrated by the progress or the speed of return of some answers to parliamentary questions. As I have said before from the Dispatch Box, the global pandemic affected the speed with which some Departments answered, because they were focused on dealing with the pandemic. That excuse has now passed. We need to see an improvement in the response from different Departments.

However, I gently say to the hon. Lady—I know she is in her happy place when she is sniping from the sidelines—that this week we have seen the Labour party this week vote against the Public Order Bill, putting it on the side of Extinction Rebellion, not on the side of hard-working people. Extinction Rebellion are the people who seized an oil tanker full of cooking oil. We have seen Labour vote against the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, because it has no interest in addressing the challenges that Northern Ireland faces. The shadow spokesman actually said that

“the rights of victims and veterans are equal to the rights of terrorists”.—[*Official Report*, 24 May 2022; Vol. 715, c. 193.]

The Labour party put itself in completely the wrong place this week. It will do anything it can to avoid taking responsibility and making the difficult decisions that this Government are having to take in the interests of the country.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I thank the Leader of the House for his kind comments about Doncaster’s city status. We are all absolutely delighted.

**Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con):** I was delighted to welcome the Sports Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) to Staffordshire last week to officially open the mountain biking venue for the upcoming Commonwealth games. It has been announced that our county town of Stafford will be part of the Queen’s baton relay. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is right not only to have a debate on the UK’s ties across the Commonwealth, but to ensure that we deliver a positive economic legacy for people and businesses in Stafford?

**Mark Spencer:** My hon. Friend is a huge champion for Stafford and Staffordshire. I know that she secured the baton coming to Stafford, which will be an opportunity for her community to celebrate the Commonwealth games. There are huge economic opportunities for the country in our hosting the Commonwealth games in the west midlands in the near future. I know that my hon. Friend will make the most of making sure the legacy of those games will be felt around her constituency, and I congratulate her on the work she is doing.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the SNP spokesperson, Pete Wishart.

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** I add to the congratulations on Doncaster being named a city. Dunfermline, my hometown in Scotland, was also added to that list. There is only one issue that our

constituents want debated, and that is the fallout from the Sue Gray report, the appalling culture at No. 10 and why this Prime Minister is still in his place. The Prime Minister might think that moving on at lightning speed to do something he could and should have done weeks ago on the cost of living crisis will make this go away, but it will not. It simply will not go away.

Our constituents are utterly furious and they are simply not satisfied with the Prime Minister’s mealy-mouthed apologies and his drivel about being humbled. They want us to debate why it was okay for No. 10 to have parties to say goodbye to employees, but no other workplace in the country was offered that facility. They want us to debate why there is one rule for this Government and another rule for everybody else in the country. They want to know why things got so out of hand at those parties that people ended up being sick, fights broke out and walls were stained with wine. They want to be told why it was okay to demean and belittle the staff whose job it was to clean up that mess, and to humiliate the security staff charged with keeping the circus safe.

Mostly, our constituents want their MPs to make sure that the Prime Minister hears, in pristine detail, the sacrifices that they all made in abiding by those rules while he oversaw and was responsible for an organisation that gratuitously partied. This is not going to go away. The people of the United Kingdom want the Prime Minister gone, and in democratic countries the people usually get their way. It is up to Conservative Back Benchers to either get rid of him or go down with him. Let us have a debate led by the Prime Minister and let us hold this rotten delusional Government to account properly.

**Mark Spencer:** I join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating Dunfermline on securing city status, but I think that is as far as I can go in agreeing with him. He speaks of what he says is the one topic that everybody wants to debate, but my experience is that people are sick and tired of hearing about it. They want the Government to focus on what actually matters to them—the global fight against inflation and an aggressive Russian state invading Ukraine and causing huge ripples around the world in energy and food prices. The hon. Gentleman says that that is the one topic that people want to debate, but it is the only topic that he wants to talk about. I thought he might have congratulated the First Minister on becoming the longest-serving First Minister in Scotland. After seven years, he might want to accept some responsibility for the disastrous performance of the Scottish Government and what we have seen in Scotland. They have let down schoolchildren; one academic in Scotland has said that

“governing became the servant of campaigning”.

That is why their education system is in tatters and drug deaths are at their highest level, and have been for seven years in a row. That says everything about SNP Members: they are more interested in stoking division and trying to challenge the Union than delivering for their constituents.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** I am obviously delighted that your campaign paid off, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Doncaster got city status, as I was born and brought up there. Next week, the Government will announce the city of culture 2025. One of the four finalists in that competition is Bradford. Were Bradford to win that

accolade, it would build on the strong cultural offer it already has, including the Brontës in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore), the world heritage site of Saltaire in my constituency and the fact that Bradford was the first ever UNESCO city of film. Given that the House will not be sitting next week, and that winning would provide a huge boost to the whole district, which has been overlooked for far too long, and to the city, which has been punching below its weight for far too long, will the Leader of the House speak to his Cabinet colleague, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and join me in lobbying her to announce that Bradford is the city of culture 2025?

**Mark Spencer:** I trust that my hon. Friend was in his place for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport questions this morning to lobby the Secretary of State directly.

**Philip Davies:** I did not get called.

**Mark Spencer:** Well, I cannot speak for Madam Deputy Speaker in failing to call the hon. Gentleman. We are always pleased to hear from him and I am surprised that he did not get called. Of course, I wish Bradford well and the other three cities that are bidding for city of culture. We await with anticipation the announcement of which city it will be. I am sure that whichever is the winner, it will be a great opportunity to visit and see the culture of that city.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

**Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab):** Can I, too, add my congratulations to Doncaster? I visit it every week—on the way up and on the way down—albeit briefly.

I thank the Leader of the House for announcing two weeks' business and for the veritable flurry of recess dates. I can give advance notice that the first debate in Backbench time on Thursday 16 June will be a debate to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the dreadful Grenfell Tower fire.

**Mark Spencer:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I again congratulate him on the work his Committee does. I think the Grenfell debate will be a great opportunity to remember what was a terrible and tragic event. I know he will continue to bring such matters to the House, and I congratulate him on his work.

**John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):** In November 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer approved the creation of another £150 billion of new money by the Bank of England and extended the guarantee against losses on all the bonds the Bank holds, making it a Treasury liability. Can we have an early statement or debate in Government time on how that has worked out, what impact it had on inflation and what impact it might have on the public finances?

**Mark Spencer:** I can deliver for my right hon. Friend: the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be at this Dispatch Box straight after me, and my right hon. Friend will have an opportunity to challenge the Chancellor of the Exchequer directly himself.

**Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab):** Next week, on 30 May, it will be the 50th anniversary of the Battersea funfair disaster, where five children died and 13 others were injured. I have been supporting the call for a permanent memorial and more support for children suffering trauma. As one survivor told me this week,

“bones are mended, physical injuries fixed but the dreadful damage to our mental health goes untreated.”

So will the Government schedule a debate in their time on improving mental health services and support for children and young people dealing with long-term trauma?

**Mark Spencer:** I thank the hon. Member for her question, and I join her in expressing sympathy to those who were victims of the Battersea funfair disaster. I wish her well in her campaign to get a permanent memorial. I think what she mentioned about mental health is worthy of debate, and I would encourage her to apply for a Westminster Hall debate or an Adjournment debate where she could pursue that.

**Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con):** Can I thank the Leader of the House for visiting the factory that makes Parliament's magnificent encaustic tiles in my constituency this week? I am delighted that he enjoyed his visit as much as he did.

In Telford, we are getting ready to celebrate the Queen's jubilee in style, with many fantastic events being organised by parish councils in every area of our community—bringing people together, and celebrating and giving thanks for the extraordinary service of Her Majesty. I want particularly to highlight the work of Hollinswood and Randlay parish council for its organisation of a platinum jubilee service and thanksgiving in Telford Town park on Saturday 4 June. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking Telford's parish councils and their clerks for their service to Telford, and may we have a debate on the important role that parish councils play in our communities?

**Mark Spencer:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and can I start by thanking the team at Jackfield for hosting me on Monday? I have turned into a bit of an art geek in that I am now walking around and looking at the tiles in Westminster to see the work they have done. Like many colleagues across the House, I rather take for granted this beautiful Palace in which we work—something that should be protected for future generations—and the art in this building is only here because of the excellent craftsmanship of companies such as those at Jackfield.

I join my hon. Friend in thanking parish councils. I think parish councils up and down the country, especially those in Telford, are doing great work. It is unpaid and it is often unrewarded, but without our parish councils our communities would be a little bit poorer. I cannot not mention Woodlands Primary School, which I also visited on Monday, where I was interrogated by those on the school council. It was a great visit, and their enthusiasm for democracy was refreshing.

**John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab):** We probably all saw the reports at the beginning of the week on the incarceration and torture of the Uyghur Muslims in China, which prove something we all thought was happening and has been widely previously reported. We



[John Cryer]

had an urgent question the following day, but there was a time when we had regular statements on China and the conduct of the regime there. Could we have a statement again?

**Mark Spencer:** The hon. Gentleman is right: there was an urgent question this week, when that was considered. The Foreign Secretary will be here on 21 June to answer Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office questions, which will be another opportunity for him to raise the matter directly with her. I know that this raises concerns with a number of colleagues across the House and I think a Backbench Business or Adjournment debate would be popular.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): We are all looking forward to the jubilee celebrations, but the RMT—the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—has called a strike at Green Park and Euston stations for Friday 3 June, it has called out the whole of the underground for Monday 6 June and I understand that strike action is threatened on all rail services throughout the country. At the moment, we do not seem to have had a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport on the action the Government will take to stop the RMT paralysing the jubilee celebrations.

**Mark Spencer:** My hon. Friend rightly highlights the outrageous RMT threat to destroy jubilee celebrations for thousands of people across the country and their ability to travel to those celebrations. The Secretary of State for Transport has been working closely with rail unions to try to deter them from this action. Strike action should be the absolute last resort rather than the first port of call. I hope they reflect on the misery they are going to inflict on millions of people during the jubilee celebrations.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): The energy company obligation, or ECO, is the Government's cornerstone scheme for supporting fuel for homes with energy-efficient measures. Delays to the next stage of the scheme, ECO4, would have devastating impacts on fuel-poor homes and the energy-efficiency industry. If it is delayed until after the summer recess, an extra 55,000 homes—households and families—could be plunged into fuel poverty. Is the energy Bill, which is necessary legislation for ECO4, going to come to this House before the summer recess? It matters.

**Mark Spencer:** The hon. Lady is right that the energy Bill was announced in the Queen's Speech and it is of course an important part of our legislative agenda. She is also right to highlight that we need our energy companies to be investing in our long and medium-term future, which we are encouraging them to do. We are making great progress in making sure we have a diverse energy supply. She will have the opportunity to challenge the Chancellor of the Exchequer directly as he will be at the Dispatch Box after me. As for the energy Bill and its timing, I am sure that will be announced from the Dispatch Box in the usual way.

**Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): Patients in hospitals should be well cared for and safe, so my constituent Mr Walsh was devastated when his 41-year-old son was

unlawfully killed in a hospital ward at the hands of security staff personnel who had only been trained to the same level as a person working as a bouncer on the door of the local nightclub or pub. Will my right hon. Friend provide some time for a debate on that to consider the use of restraint in settings where people are vulnerable, such as hospitals and a number of other settings? This issue does need to be addressed in a debate.

**Mark Spencer:** I am truly sorry to hear about the plight of Mr Walsh. That sounds like a shocking set of circumstances. Health questions are on 14 June and I hope my hon. Friend will be in her place then to ask the Secretary of State what he can do to assist, but I wish her well in her pursuit of the truth of what happened.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call Barry Sheerman.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I also congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on Doncaster becoming a city? I hope that comes with a lot of investment and innovation, if we really believe in levelling up. I support, too, Bradford's city of culture bid. We will not mention Huddersfield's wonderful weekend: we can see Huddersfield twice in brilliant football and rugby league matches.

It is now clear that the Government want to privatise the BBC; it is not just Channel 4. It is very clear from the statement by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport that it is the ambition of this Government to abolish the BBC. In the year we are celebrating the Queen's platinum jubilee, here is the thanks we give her subjects, who value the BBC as one of the other great institutions of our country. Can we have an early debate on that?

**Mark Spencer:** I seem inadvertently to have started a Doncaster celebration. I wish the Huddersfield Giants well in the rugby league final. We will park that one there.

Perhaps I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that there is no agenda to privatise the BBC or to abolish the BBC, as he suggested. The BBC is a great institution, but we need to recognise that TV and media viewing is changing. The modern world is different from the 1950s, when the BBC was created. A modern BBC needs to compete in the modern world, and the Government will assist it in doing so.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. There is a big statement after the business question, so I urge colleagues to be very brief in their questions.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): A local vicar in my constituency has applied to take in Ukrainian refugees. The grandparents have been approved to come to my constituency. Unfortunately, their 11-year-old grandson has not been given permission because of red tape, as far as I can see. There is no policy, as yet, for unaccompanied minors to come to this country. He is not unaccompanied, because of his grandparents. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week from the Minister who can cut red tape, so that this Ukrainian family can come to my constituency as soon as possible?



**Mark Spencer:** If my hon. Friend writes to me with the details, I will raise his question directly with the Home Secretary on his behalf.

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Black women are five times more likely to die in childbirth, according to a report by the Joint Committee on Human Rights 18 months ago and, prior to giving birth, they are 40% more likely than white women to suffer a miscarriage. That is a shocking inequality. Will the Leader of the House consider a debate in Government time on how to breach those serious inequalities in maternity care between black and white women?

**Mark Spencer:** I thank the hon. Lady for that question, and I join her in the ambition to close that gap in service that those women feel. Maternity services up and down the country are working hard to help with childbirth. Hopefully she will be in her place on 14 June for Health questions, and I think an Adjournment debate or Backbench Business debate would be widely supported.

**Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Nottingham Forest on reaching the championship play-off final and wishing them the very best of luck for Sunday? Does he agree that, when they return victorious from Wembley, we should have a debate in Government time on their triumphs—past, present and future?

**Mark Spencer:** To be honest, I am torn between overenthusiasm and fearing that I will jinx what might be a marvellous day. I say to my hon. Friend, “City Ground, Oh mist rolling in from the Trent, My desire is always to be there, Oh City Ground.” Let’s see what happens on Sunday.

**Neale Hanvey** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): Last Saturday, my constituent Andrew McLeod was trying to board his 7.20 flight to Alicante. He passed through security and passport control, but even though his passport was valid until 22 December, he was refused access to his flight because the airline was using the metric of date of issue plus 10 years minus three months, which meant his passport was invalid. He is not alone. This is an issue that has now been picked up by the media. Given the enormous pressure on HM Passport Office that we are all aware of, this is a significant problem that people are finding out about only as they attempt to board. Mr McLeod is not worried about his own circumstances—his family were upset but they went on holiday—but he is concerned about those travelling with some urgency or for compassionate reasons. Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Office to issue urgent clarification on this rule, so it is well understood not just by Members and the public but, most important, by airlines? Will an urgent statement be brought forward on the matter?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I really do need to emphasise that the questions need to be brief, otherwise we just will not get through everybody.

**Mark Spencer:** I am sorry to hear about the plight of Mr McLeod. I hope his family had a good time while they were away, despite him not being with them. I will, of course, pass on the hon. Member’s comments directly to the Home Secretary. She has been investing in many

more staff in the Passport Office to try to get through the backlog. I think we have already seen 700 announced on top of the 500 already recruited, so the Home Office is focused on solving these challenges.

**Richard Fuller** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for visiting Biggleswade in my constituency last week. So he will know that the flight paths for Luton Airport have changed recently, creating air and noise pollution for Potton, Sandy and Biggleswade and, further, that Luton Airport is seeking a substantial expansion in capacity. He may not know that Labour-run Luton Council currently gets tens of millions of pounds from Luton Airport, and there is nothing for surrounding communities. Can we have a debate in Government time on how communities can benefit if airports are allowed to expand?

**Mark Spencer:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and his hospitality last week in Biggleswade. It is an important issue that is worthy of further debate. Transport questions are on 30 June and I am sure he will be in his place to challenge the Secretary of State directly, but an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate on the benefit of Luton Airport and regional airports would be worthy of further discussion.

**Mrs Paulette Hamilton** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I am campaigning to oppose the latest planning application for a betting shop on Erdington High Street. We already have seven bookies on the High Street and the last thing we need is yet another one. Last year, a multi-million pound bid to transform Erdington High Street was turned down by the Government. We will be submitting another application soon and I hope that Ministers will not let us down this time. So can we have a debate on the vital need to invest in our high streets?

**Mark Spencer:** There are existing powers for local authorities to stop such applications and I encourage the hon. Lady to press her local authority to take a stand. I wish her well with her campaign. But I will pass her comments on to the planning Minister directly, so he can respond to her.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): There are some reports in the local press that on 6 June the Government intend to introduce a Northern Ireland protocol amendment Bill. If that is the case, can the Leader of the House confirm that? If it is not, when do they intend to expedite this matter and will it be by accelerated passage?

**Mark Spencer:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I have announced the coming business for the two weeks after we return from recess, but he is right to highlight the protocol. It is an important issue that needs to be solved. We need to get Stormont back up and running, and we need to solve the challenges facing his community and communities across Northern Ireland. Discussions are ongoing with the EU, but the Government reserve the right to take action if we cannot solve those challenges through negotiation.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Elisha and the rest of the team at Blaen-y-Maes—I look forward to hearing him say that—Drop In centre on producing their new community cookbook? The book is free, funded by the city council, and recognises that what is

[Carolyn Harris]

left on the supermarket shelves at the end of the day and in foodbanks is not necessarily familiar to struggling families. It is a classic example of communities coming together to support each other, especially in the current economic crisis.

**Mark Spencer:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I am blessed to have my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) as my Parliamentary Private Secretary, so I have been tutored on how to say Blaen-y-Maes. I wish the hon. Lady's community well. It is doing great work, and there are lots of suggestions from across the House on how families up and down the country can meet the economic challenge we face and the global battle against inflation.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): "The UK Government's Strategy

for International Development" was published as Command Paper 676 on 16 May, but the Government have not seen fit to schedule either a statement or a debate so that Members can scrutinise this significant change in international development policy, which particularly diminishes the role of tackling climate change, mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Foreign Secretary either to come and lead a debate or make a statement on this important policy change as soon as possible?

**Mark Spencer:** There are Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office questions on 21 June. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be in his place to put those questions directly to the Foreign Secretary and that she will be able to respond in due course.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I have repeatedly raised concerns about unsafe maternity care at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust. The Leader of the House will know that the review that was commissioned last year has lost the confidence of families, and of local MPs, and the Secretary of State said that it was not fit for purpose. On 22 April, we were told that the review would have new national oversight from NHS England and NHS Improvement under a new chair. On 4 May, that new chair resigned. Weeks later, we still do not know what is happening. Families have suffered unspeakable pain, and the delay and uncertainty is adding to their trauma. Will he urge the Health Secretary to provide an urgent update and do what everyone knows is obvious, which is to appoint Donna Ockenden to chair the review?

**Mark Spencer:** I join the hon. Lady in her campaign and I pay tribute to her for the work she has done. There are Health questions on 14 June and I hope that she will raise that with the Health Secretary directly. However, I will assist her in any way I can to improve maternity services in Nottinghamshire and the wider area.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): My constituency office in Blaydon cannot be the only one to still be inundated with passport queries from distraught residents who are facing a tight deadline and increased charges from travel companies for the rearrangement of dates. Will

the Leader of the House ask the Government to make a statement about the very practical steps that they intend to take to ensure that this fiasco is sorted out?

**Mark Spencer:** I recognise the challenge that the hon. Lady highlights. There are Home Office questions on 20 June and the Home Secretary will be here to answer questions directly. However, she has already introduced 500 staff, with 700 more coming before the summer. That is a commitment to improve the performance of the Passport Office and we are starting to see the results of the extra staff now.

**Taiwo Owatemi** (Coventry North West) (Lab): In the interests of transparency, I declare that I am a trustee of the wonderful Albany theatre, which is a cornerstone of my city of Coventry. It does such wonderful work with its productions that represent people from all backgrounds, enabling them to enjoy, have access to and participate in the theatre. Recently, it applied for national portfolio organisation status. Will the Leader of the House and his counterpart in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport meet me to discuss what we can do to further strengthen the NPO application and to bring much needed investment into Coventry?

**Mark Spencer:** I join the hon. Lady in wishing that theatre all the best. I hope that she was in her place for DCMS questions this morning to highlight that cause. Coventry, of course, is a former city of culture. I am sure that people up and down the country will have taken the opportunity to visit Coventry and celebrate all that is cultural in the city.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Tomorrow, 27 May, is World Animal Free Research Day. The sentient rights of animals in the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 could, and should, have been strengthened to recognise the rights of sentient animals undergoing horrific scientific testing and those in Ministry of Defence military experiments. Will the Leader of the House set out in a statement his support for all animals in the UK to have their rights as sentient beings enshrined in law, wherever they may be, and for a public scientific hearing on this issue? And will he join me in recognising that the European Union is moving away from cruel experiments on animals and using cutting-edge replacements?

**Mark Spencer:** The Government have a very good track record on animal welfare. The hon. Lady is right to highlight the fact that we were the first Government to introduce an animal sentience Bill. More Bills on animals were announced in the Queen's Speech. We have a great track record on welfare and agricultural production in the UK; we are a proud nation of animal lovers, and I see no reason why that will not continue.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): May I return to the issue of written parliamentary questions? I have frustrations not only about the timeliness of responses from the Department of Health and Social Care, but about the standard of those responses when we get them. For example, in relation to the immunocompromised, the clinically extremely vulnerable and the clinically vulnerable, I asked what equalities impact assessment the Department had made in relation to the Government's living with covid strategy. The

reply from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup), stated that she was

“unable to provide the information requested as it relates to the formulation of Government policy.”

That is why I asked the question! Will the Leader of the House pull his finger out and get Ministers to respond to written parliamentary questions not only in time, but at a much better standard than we are getting from the Department of Health and Social Care?

**Mark Spencer:** I have committed several times at the Dispatch Box to trying to improve the speed at which answers come from Departments. The hon. Gentleman will understand that the Department of Health and Social Care was smashed with questions when it was fighting a global pandemic; I think we can excuse the speed at which some responses came last year. We are now through that pandemic, thanks to the Department's hard work, and I am sure we will see an improvement in the speed at which questions are answered. I cannot guarantee that the hon. Gentleman will always like the answers, though: there may be some political differences between us, and his not liking the answers may not be something to which I can deliver a solution.

**Zarah Sultana** (Coventry South) (Lab): When I was elected as one of the youngest MPs two and a half years ago, I had fantastic support from more experienced local councillors and activists in Coventry, and none more so than Councillor John Mutton. Very sadly, John passed away suddenly the weekend before last, leaving behind his wonderful wife Mal, two sons, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and an unrivalled legacy in Coventry. As leader of the council in 2010, John put his anti-austerity principles into practice, defending services from Government cuts. Perhaps his proudest achievement was championing the international children's games, winning him international respect; he helped to bring the games back to Coventry this August. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to John? Will he give Government time for hon. Members to thank our dedicated local public servants?

**Mark Spencer:** I am delighted to join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to John; she has done an excellent job of paying tribute to him. I think that celebrating local government and all the sacrifices of those who work in it is worthy of debate. I hope that such a debate would have cross-party support.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): I have dozens of constituents who are desperate to bring family members to this country through legal routes, including a father who has been separated from his wife and son for more than six months. His son is due to celebrate his first birthday in July: he will have spent only three months of his life with his father. The reason for the delay in processing the mother's visa, we are told, is the pressures on the Home Office from Ukrainian visa processing, but let us not forget that it was Ministers who insisted on all the red tape around bringing Ukrainian refugees over. Will the Leader of the House grant time for a debate to discuss delays across the Home Office?

**Mark Spencer:** I am glad that the hon. Lady recognises that legal routes are the best routes to get to the United Kingdom. We have a great track record to celebrate. We are a very compassionate country: we have taken refugees

from Syria, Afghanistan and now Ukraine, and that will continue. The Home Office is working very hard to expedite the process as quickly as possible.

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): In 2016, a court judgment established that joint enterprise had been incorrectly applied for more than 30 years, but research by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies with the campaign group JENGbA—Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association—supports the belief that that judgment has had little to no effect on joint enterprise convictions. Young black men are disproportionately targeted. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate in Government time on the miscarriages of justice arising from joint enterprise laws and on the legislative solutions, including a private Member's Bill, that are needed to correct those historical and current injustices?

**Mark Spencer:** I hope that the hon. Lady will be present for Home Office questions on 20 June to raise those matters directly with the Home Secretary, but let me say now that the Government take the fight against crime very seriously. That is why the Queen's Speech included an economic crime Bill and a victims Bill, and that is why we have committed ourselves to providing an extra 20,000 police officers, 13,500 of whom have already been recruited. Dealing with crime is at the top of our agenda, and we are delivering on that.

**Fleur Anderson** (Putney) (Lab): There is a catastrophic famine in east Africa. According to a report published by Oxfam and Save the Children, someone is dying every 48 seconds. In the last year alone, the number of people experiencing extreme hunger has increased from 10 million to 23 million. We know from the experience of Band Aid, many years ago, that the British public are very generous, and they will want us to have a debate in Government time on the aid and debt-related response to this crisis. Will the Leader of the House commit himself to that?

**Mark Spencer:** Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office questions will take place on 21 June, but the hon. Lady is right to point out that the UK has a fantastic track record of compassion and support for those who find themselves in difficult circumstances. We are proud of having introduced the aid target of 0.7% of GDP to support the Department for International Development. We take pride in our record, and it will continue.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): May I ask the Leader of the House again if he will back an independent inquiry into why allegations of child sexual abuse were ignored?

**Mark Spencer:** I am aware that the case to which the hon. Lady has referred is ongoing, but the Conservative party takes very seriously whom it chooses as candidates and how those candidates behave. There are now systems in the House that support victims, and the House has made a huge amount of cross-party progress in supporting those who come forward. The one thing that we can take from some of the terrible events we have seen is that if someone is a victim of abuse their allegations will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated, and those who have committed abuse will be held to account.



**Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab): High streets in my constituency continue to be blighted by gambling venues that prey on some of the most vulnerable in society. I asked the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor when the review of the Gambling Act 2005 would report, and was met with no answer. The report is now nearly eight months late. May we therefore have a debate in Government time on the damaging effects that these venues are having on vulnerable people, and what action will be taken to ensure that they cannot continue to buy up our high streets with such ease and break up our communities?

**Mark Spencer:** The hon. Lady will be aware that local authorities can stop betting shops appearing on the high streets if they wish to deploy their powers to do so. She should lobby her local council to make sure that it does not grant permission to too many of them.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): Access to Work provides practical advice and support for disabled people and their employers to help them to overcome work-related obstacles resulting from disability. It can support people in work, and help them to get into work. Support under the scheme can include communication support, support for interviews, help with travel costs and a support worker, British Sign Language interpreters, lipspeakers or note takers, and adaptations to people's vehicles so that they can get to work. According to Scope, there are more than 4.7 million disabled people in work. In 2020-21, Access to Work provision was approved for about 36,000 people, a relatively small number. Will the Leader of the House allocate Government time for a debate on Access to Work to enable us to consider ways in which the scheme might be better publicised and access to it improved, so that more people might benefit from it?

**Mark Spencer:** The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is present and has heard the hon. Lady's question, but she will have an opportunity to put it to the Secretary of State directly during Work and Pensions questions on our first day back after the recess.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is less than a fortnight until the 10th anniversary of the UK's signing the Istanbul convention on violence against women and girls. It has been a long-drawn-out process, but I welcome the Government's statement last week in which they confirmed that they would finally ratify the convention. However, it will be ratified with two reservations, in relation to migrant workers and the prosecution of UK residents for crimes committed overseas. May we have a debate on ratifying without reservation? Surely "all women" means "all women".

**Mark Spencer:** I think that the Government have a fantastic track record on tackling violence against women and girls. We have introduced legislation on these matters, and we will continue to push in that direction. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will be present to support the Government when they introduce further measures.

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): After months of late-running, cancelled and woefully inadequate bus services, Stagecoach is in the process of cutting a further 17 services across my constituency, leaving communities more isolated and jeopardising people's jobs. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate in Government time on the role of traffic commissioners throughout Great Britain, so that passengers may have an added voice to ensure that private bus companies, and other companies, do not cut services and leave communities at risk?

**Mark Spencer:** I do not think there has ever been a Prime Minister who is more in favour of buses than the current Prime Minister, but let me gently say to the hon. Gentleman that it is his party that is in charge of transport in Wales. If he feels that he is being let down by Labour Wales, perhaps he should consider crossing the Floor and supporting us.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Pupils from St Ninian's Primary School in Hillhouse Hamilton, in my constituency, made a lovely fair trade curry for local residents last week, using fair trade coconut milk and fair trade Kilombero rice from Malawi to mark World Fair Trade Day. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating those students, and will he schedule a debate in Government time on the importance of fair trade values?

**Mark Spencer:** I should be delighted to join the hon. Lady in congratulating the school on creating its wonderful curry. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will want to go and share it. Colleagues across the House enjoy a good curry evening. I wish the school well in all that it is doing.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): This week, the Emir of Qatar visited the UK. The United Nations special rapporteur, Ahmed Shaheed, recently reported on discrimination facing Baha'is in Qatar, including forced deportations, arbitrary arrests, and blacklisting from the labour market. In the run-up to the World cup, will the Leader of the House join me, and others, in urging the Emir to investigate those reports and guarantee Baha'is the rights to which they are entitled under the Qatari constitution?

**Mark Spencer:** May I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for saving the hon. Gentleman up until the end, so that he has an audience worthy of his question? He is a great campaigner on religious rights across the world. I think that the Qatar World cup will provide an opportunity for the world to look at Qatar and all that it does, and I hope we will take that opportunity to improve human rights and religious freedom there.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I thank the Lord President of the Council for his business statement. I hope that the House will now settle down.

## Economy Update

12.17 pm

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak):** The high inflation that we are experiencing now is causing acute distress to the people of this country. I know that they are worried. I know that people are struggling. I want to explain what is happening, why it is happening, and what we propose to do about it.

I trust the British people, and I know they understand that no Government can solve every problem, particularly the complex and global challenge of inflation, but this Government will never stop trying to help people, to fix problems where we can and to do what is right, as we did throughout the pandemic. We need to make sure that those for whom the struggle is too hard, and for whom the risks are too great, are supported. This Government will not sit idly by while there is a risk that some in our country might be set so far back that they might never recover. That is simply unacceptable, and we will never allow it to happen.

I want to reassure everybody that we will get through this. We have the tools and the determination we need to combat and reduce inflation. We will make sure that the most vulnerable and least well off get the support they need at this time of difficulty, and we will also turn this moment of difficulty into a springboard for economic renewal and growth, with more jobs, higher skills and greater investment: our plan for a stronger economy.

Before I turn to the details of our plan, let me put into context for the House the challenge we face. This country is now experiencing the highest rate of inflation we have seen for 40 years. The Bank of England expects inflation to average around 9% this year. Our exposure to global shocks continues to explain most of the inflation above the 2% target. Supply chain disruption as the world reopened from covid, combined with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and potentially exacerbated by recent lockdowns in China, are all contributing to significant price increases for goods and energy.

However, over the course of the year, the situation has evolved and become more serious. There are areas of particular concern. Even excluding energy and food, core inflation has become broader-based and elevated. Of the basket of goods and services we use to measure inflation, a record proportion is seeing above-average price increases. Also, we are acutely exposed to the European energy price shock and, like the US, we have a tight labour market. Make no mistake, the lowest unemployment in almost 50 years, just months after averting a jobs crisis during the pandemic, is good news, but combined with the shock to European energy prices, it does contribute to the UK's relatively high rate of inflation.

Lastly, as the Bank has noted, longer-term inflation expectations have risen above their historical averages by more than they are doing in the US and Europe. We cannot and must not allow short-term inflationary pressures to lead people to expect that high inflation will continue over the long term. We can get inflation under control. It is not some abstract force outside our grasp. It may take time, but we have the tools we need and the resolve it will take to reduce inflation. We have three specific tools available to combat and reduce inflation, and we are using them all: independent monetary policy, fiscal responsibility and supply-side activism.

First, our primary tool is a strong independent monetary policy. Since control of monetary policy was taken out of the hands of politicians 25 years ago, inflation has averaged precisely 2%. It is right that the Bank of England is independent, and I know that the Governor and his team will take decisive action to get inflation back on target and ensure that inflation expectations remain firmly anchored.

Secondly, we need responsible fiscal policy. That means providing fiscal support where required but not making the situation unnecessarily worse, causing inflation, interest and mortgage rates to go up further than they otherwise would. Excessively adding fiscal stimulus into a supply-constrained economy, especially one in which households and businesses have built up over £300 billion of excess savings, risks being counterproductive and increasing inflationary pressures. In other words, fiscal support should be timely, temporary and targeted. Timely because we need to help people when the shock is at its worst, targeted because unconstrained stimulus will make the problem worse, and temporary because if we do not meet our fiscal rules and ensure the public finances are resilient in the longer run, we create even greater risks on inflation, interest rates and the trend rate of economic growth.

Thirdly, we are taking an activist approach to supply-side reforms. This will increase our productive capacity, ease inflationary pressures and raise our long-term growth potential. The Prime Minister's energy security strategy will reduce bills over time by increasing energy supply and improving energy efficiency. The Work and Pensions Secretary is moving half a million jobseekers off welfare and into work and doing more to support older people back into the jobs market. The Home Secretary is making our visa regime for high-skilled migrants one of the most competitive in the world, and in the autumn we will bring forward tax cuts and reforms to encourage businesses to invest more, train more and innovate more—the path to higher growth. Independent monetary policy, fiscal response ability and supply-side reform—the country should have confidence that using these three tools, we will combat inflation and reduce it over time.

But of course, we know that households are being hit hard right now, so today we will provide significant support to the British people. As I have said, a critical part of how we are dealing with inflation is responsible fiscal policy. What this means in practical terms is that as we support people more, we need to think about the fairest way to fund as much of that cost as possible. The oil and gas sector is making extraordinary profits, not as the result of recent changes to risk taking or innovation or efficiency, but as the result of surging global commodity prices, driven in part by Russia's war. For that reason, I am sympathetic to the argument to tax those profits fairly, but—[*Interruption.*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. A bit of gentle banter is fine, but when it gets to the stage that nobody can hear what the Chancellor is saying, it is counterproductive. Quieter banter, please.

**Rishi Sunak:** But, as ever, there is a sensible middle ground. We should not be ideological about this; we should be pragmatic. It is possible to both tax extraordinary profits fairly and incentivise investment. So, like previous Governments, including Conservative ones, we will introduce a temporary targeted energy profits levy—[*Interruption.*] But we have built into the new levy—

[Rishi Sunak]

[*Interruption.*] We have built into the new levy a new investment allowance similar to the super deduction, which means that companies will have a new and significant incentive to reinvest their profits.

The new levy will be charged on the profits of oil and gas companies at a rate of 25%. It will be temporary, and when oil and gas prices return to historically more normal levels, the levy will be phased out, with a sunset clause written into the legislation. And crucially, with our new investment allowance, we are nearly doubling the overall investment relief for oil and gas companies. That means that for every pound a company invests, it will get back 90% in tax relief. So the more a company invests, the less tax it will pay.

We understand that certain parts of the electricity generation sector are also making extraordinary profits. The reason for this is the way our market works. The price our electricity generators are paid is linked not to the costs they incur in providing that electricity but rather to the price of natural gas, which is extraordinarily high right now. Other countries such as France, Italy, Spain and Greece have already taken measures to correct this. As set out in the energy security strategy, we are consulting with the power generation sector and investors to drive forward energy market reforms and ensure that the price paid for electricity is more reflective of the costs of production.

These reforms will take time to implement, so in the meantime, we are urgently evaluating the scale of these extraordinary profits and the appropriate steps to take. So our energy profits levy will encourage investment, not deter it. It will raise around £5 billion of revenue over the next year so that we can help families with the cost of living, and it avoids having to increase our debt burden further. There is nothing noble in burdening future generations with ever more debt today because the politicians of the day were too weak to make the tough decisions.

I know the whole House will agree that we have a responsibility to help those who, through no fault of their own, are paying the highest price for the inflation we face. To help with the cost of living, we are going to provide significant targeted support to millions of the most vulnerable people in our society: those on the lowest incomes, pensioners and disabled people.

First, on people on the lowest incomes, over 8 million households already have incomes low enough for the state to be supporting their cost of living through the welfare system. They could be temporarily unemployed and looking for work; they could be unable to work because of long-term sickness or disability; or they could be on low pay and using benefits to top up their wages. Right now, they face incredibly difficult choices. I can announce today that we will send directly to around 8 million of the lowest-income households a one-off cost of living payment of £650. That support is worth over £5 billion and will give vulnerable people certainty that we are standing by them at this challenging time. The Department for Work and Pensions will make the payment in two lump sums, the first from July and the second in the autumn, with payments from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs for those on tax credits following shortly after. There is no need for people to fill out complicated forms or bureaucracy, as we will send the payments straight to their bank account.

Our policy will benefit over 8 million households in receipt of means-tested benefits from July. Uprating in that timeframe could only be done for those on universal credit, and our policy will provide a larger average payment this year of £650, whereas uprating the same benefits by 9% would be worth only £530 on average.

There are two further groups who will need extra targeted support. Many pensioners are disproportionately impacted by higher energy costs. They cannot always increase their income through work and, because they spend more time at home and are more vulnerable, they often need to keep the heating on for longer. We estimate that many people who are eligible for pension credit are not currently claiming it, which means many vulnerable pensioners will not be receiving means-tested benefits. I can announce today that, from the autumn, we will send over 8 million pensioner households that receive the winter fuel payment an extra one-off pensioner cost of living payment of £300.

Disabled people also face extra costs in their day-to-day lives; for example, they may have energy-intensive equipment around their home or workplace. To help the 6 million people who receive non-means-tested disability benefits, we will send them, from September, an extra one-off disability cost of living payment worth £150. Many disabled people will also receive the payment of £650 I have already announced, taking their total cost of living payment to £800.

I can reassure the House that next year, subject to the review by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, benefits will be uprated by this September's consumer prices index, which on the current forecast is likely to be significantly higher than the forecast inflation rate for next year. Similarly, the triple lock will apply to the state pension.

Of course we recognise the risk that, with any policy, there may be small numbers of people who fall between the cracks. For example, it is not possible right now for the DWP or HMRC to identify people on housing benefit who are not also claiming other benefits. To support them and others, we will extend the household support fund delivered by local authorities by £0.5 billion from October.

This is a significant set of interventions to support the most vulnerable in our country. We will legislate to deliver this support on the same terms in every part of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. Taken together, our direct cash payments will help one third of all UK households with cost of living support worth £9 billion.

We are meeting our responsibility to provide the most help to those on the lowest incomes. I believe that is fair, and I am confident that the House will agree, but many other families who do not require state support in normal times are also facing challenging times. Is it fair to leave them unsupported? The answer must surely be no.

Although it is impossible for the Government to solve every problem, we can and will ease the burden as we help the entire country through the worst of this crisis. We will provide more support with the rising cost of energy, and that support will be universal. Earlier this year, we announced £9 billion to help with the cost of energy, including a council tax rebate of £150 for tens of millions of households.



We planned to provide all households with £200 off their energy bills from October, with the cost repaid over the following five years. Since then, the outlook for energy prices has changed. I have heard people's concerns about the impact of these repayments on future bills, so I have decided that the repayments will be cancelled. For the avoidance of doubt, this support is now unambiguously a grant. Furthermore, we have decided that the £200 of support for household energy bills will be doubled to £400 for everyone. We are on the side of hard-working families with £6 billion of financial support.

To summarise, our strategy is to combat and reduce inflation over time through independent monetary policy, fiscal responsibility and supply-side activism. We are raising emergency funds to help millions of the most vulnerable families who are struggling right now, and all households will benefit from £400 of universal support for energy bills, with not a penny to repay.

In total, the measures I have announced today provide support worth £15 billion. Combined with the plans we have already announced, we are supporting families with the cost of living through £37 billion or 1.5% of GDP. That is more than or similar to the support in countries such as France, Germany, Japan and Italy. I am proud to say that around three quarters of that total support will go to vulnerable households.

As a result of the measures announced today and the action we have already taken this year, the vast majority of households will receive £550, pensioners will receive £850 and almost all of the 8 million most vulnerable households in the country will, in total, receive support of £1,200.

Let me put that in context. The House will have noted the news from Ofgem earlier this week that it expects the energy price cap to rise to £2,800 in October. That implies an average increase in people's bills this year of just under £1,200, which is the same amount as our policies will provide for the most vulnerable people this year.

I know there are other pressures. I am not trying to claim that we have solved the entire problem for everyone—no Government could—but I hope that when people hear of the significant steps we are taking, and the millions we are helping, they will feel some of the burden eased and some of the pressures lifted. They will know that this Government are standing by them.

Supporting people with the cost of living is only one part of our plan for a stronger economy—a plan that is: creating more jobs; cutting taxes on working people; reducing our borrowing and debt; driving businesses to invest and innovate more; unleashing a skills revolution; seizing the benefits of Brexit; and levelling-up growth in all parts of the United Kingdom. The British people can trust this Government because we have a plan for a stronger economy, and I commend it to this House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I call the shadow Chancellor, Rachel Reeves.

12.39 pm

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): After today's announcement, let there be no doubt about who is winning the battle of ideas in Britain—it is the Labour party. Today, it feels as though the Chancellor has finally realised the problems the country is facing. We first called for a windfall tax on oil and gas producers

nearly five months ago, to help struggling families and pensioners. Today, he has announced that policy but he dare not say the words; it is a policy that dare not speak its name for this Chancellor. It was also Labour that first highlighted the unfairness of this Government's buy now, pay later compulsory loan scheme. It should not have taken a rocket scientist to work out that this would not cut it, and we pointed that out at the time, but that is the mark of this Klarna Chancellor: announce now, ditch later. Here he is, once again, the Treasury's one-man rebuttal unit, the Chancellor himself.

For months, it has been clear that more was necessary to help people bring their bills down, so what took this Government so long? Every day that they have refused to act, we have had £53 million added to Britain's household bills during this cost of living crisis. This Government's dither and delay has cost our country dearly. Labour welcomes the fact that the Government are finally acting on our calls to introduce a windfall tax, and it is good to see the SNP U-turning today and saying that they, too, are in favour of a windfall tax on oil and gas profits—well done to the SNP.

It was a painful journey to get the Government to this point. First, Conservative Ministers said that oil and gas producers were “struggling”—that was the Education Secretary, I think—but then the BP chief executive said that the energy crisis was a “cash machine” for his business, so the Government moved to the second defence. Ministers claimed that a windfall tax would put off vital investments, but the industry said that it would not even change its plans. Then the Government said that a windfall tax would be “un-Conservative”. It is so un-Conservative that Margaret Thatcher, George Osborne and now this Government are doing exactly that. Finally, the Chancellor said that it would be “silly” to offer help now, given that he did not know the full scale of the challenge. What nonsense! It should not take half a million pounds of publicly funded focus groups for the Chancellor to realise that helping families and pensioners is exactly the right thing to do.

Every day for five months, the Prime Minister sent Conservative MPs out to attack the windfall tax and yet defend an increase in taxes on working people. He has made them vote against the windfall tax not once, not twice, but three times. For months, he has sent his MPs to defend the litany of rule-breaking in No. 10 Downing Street that was set out in the Sue Gray report yesterday. There is a lesson here for Conservative MPs: you cannot believe a word this Prime Minister says, and as long as he is in office, he will continue making fools out of each and every one of you. If they keep him there, that is their choice. The problem is that you cannot fake fairness—you either believe in it or you don't.

Labour called for a windfall tax because it is the right thing to do. The Conservatives are bringing it in because they needed a new headline. We see that, too, from all the other things that the Chancellor did not address today: the non-doms keeping their tax privileges while the Government increase taxes on working people; young working people paying more, but those who earn money buying and selling stocks and shares not paying a penny more; contracts handed out to Conservative friends and donors while British businesses miss out; global tech giants making billions in profits while smaller businesses and the energy-intensive industries struggle with higher

[Rachel Reeves]

bills and higher taxes from the Conservative party; and £11.8 billion lost in fraud because of a total lack of respect for taxpayers' money. That is why we should have had an emergency Budget today that spikes the hike in national insurance, cuts business rates for high-street and small businesses, provides help for energy-intensive firms and ensures that every pound of taxpayers' money is spent wisely.

We will look closely at the detail of today's announcements. Of course, most of them seem to be written by us, but so far we have seen nothing to suggest that this Conservative Government have the ideas or the energy to tackle the challenges we face as a country. A Labour Government would have addressed the underlying weaknesses in our economy, so that we can stop this spiral of inflation, lift wages and provide greater security for families and for our country. The truth is that the Conservatives are running our economy, and people's living standards, into the ground. We are forecast to have the slowest growth and the highest inflation in the G7. This Government have weakened the foundations of our economy, leaving us exposed to shocks as we lurch from crisis to crisis, and still they refuse to come forward with a real plan to fix our broken system and provide the security we need to face the future with confidence. That means boosting our energy security too. We need to do much more to reduce our reliance on imported oil and gas. That is why Labour's energy security plan includes a programme of home insulation, to reduce bills not just for one year, but for years to come and to get us all the way to net zero. It is why we have urged the Government to double onshore wind capacity and to end the delay on nuclear power. [Interruption.] And while we are at it, why did this Tory Government get rid of our gas storage— [Interruption.]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. It is important that we also hear the shadow Chancellor.

**Rachel Reeves:** While we are at it, why did this Tory Government get rid of our gas storage, which would have left us better protected from wild fluctuations in prices? When will this Government provide the strong leadership that this country needs?

There are a number of questions for the Chancellor about his announcement today. How many people are still waiting for the support they were promised in March? A third of his constituents are still waiting for their council tax discounts. Are households still being asked to pay the supplier of last resort costs for those energy suppliers that have gone bust as a result of a decade of failed energy market regulation? How is this package being funded, outside of the proceeds of a windfall tax? If someone has more than one home, do they get multiple discounts on their energy bills? I know that the Chancellor has adopted two of our ideas today, but may I ask why he has not adopted a third: a cut in VAT on energy bills? It was once touted as the big Brexit bonus, but he has ditched that too. This is a discredited, chaotic and rudderless Conservative Government, whose policies rarely last more than a few months. We pushed for a windfall tax and they adopted it. We said the buy now, pay later scheme was wrong and now they have ditched it. This Government are out

of ideas, out of touch and out of time. When it comes to the big issues facing this country, the position is now clear: we lead, they follow. [HON. MEMBERS: "More!"]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. We are not going any further unless you are quiet. I call the Chairman of the Select Committee, Mel Stride. [Interruption.] I beg your pardon. It would be best if I allowed the Chancellor first to reply to the shadow Chancellor. I am not trying to change the rules; I am just trying to go a bit faster. I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) for her contribution, albeit her response was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of why now is the right time to act. Since February and March, three significant things have changed: the situation in Ukraine has altered considerably from what was first envisaged; inflation is now tacking considerably higher than was previously expected; and finally, and most importantly, we now have concrete information on the autumn and winter energy price cap. With that information, we were better able to design and to scale our policies. That is why, with time and thought, our energy profits levy has a very generous investment allowance built into it—not something proposed in the Labour party's blunt instrument.

Because we were patient, we have been able to scale our support to the problem, which means that our proposals are in fact more generous than those offered by the Labour party. Because Labour Members rushed it, they got their sums wrong. But we all make mistakes, and being able to change course is not a weakness: it is a strength. I will not criticise the Labour party for getting it wrong, just so long as Labour can acknowledge that with this package we have got it right.

Let me address some of the specific points. I think the hon. Lady talked about energy security and, somewhat bizarrely, reflected on the lack of investment in nuclear capacity. Well, this is the Government who are correcting the mistakes of the past.

The hon. Lady asked about energy efficiency. This is the Government who are investing £6 billion to improve energy efficiency.

The hon. Lady asked about business rates. This is the Government who are delivering a 50% discount in business rates for our high streets next year.

The hon. Lady talked about growth. One of the best ways to drive growth is to drive up business investment. That is something the Labour party will never understand.

The hon. Lady also asked about VAT. This goes to the heart of the issue. VAT is worth, on average, about £140 of support; our policy, universally—to all households in this country—is worth £400. That is the reason not to do VAT. What we are doing is far more generous.

My final point—I know we are pressed for time, Madam Deputy Speaker—is about ideas. For our constituents, there are only good ideas and bad ideas, and whether we can do anything about them. This Government can, because we are always on the side of the British people. This Government have been faced with challenges unlike any other and at every step we have achieved things that the Labour party said were not possible. We averted the mass unemployment crisis that Labour predicted because of our furlough

interventions. We led the country out of covid with a vaccine programme that Labour would have left us unable to deliver. Each time I am at this Dispatch Box opposite the hon. Lady, I find myself thinking the same thing: the public can see through it. They know the difference between a party playing politics and a Government trying to help. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. That is enough. Now we will hear from the Chairman of the Select Committee, Mel Stride.

**Mel Stride** (Central Devon) (Con): I broadly commend the announcement. My right hon. Friend has made a significant intervention to channel billions of pounds in a targeted series of transfer payments to those who most need it, but, as he will know, similar approaches were taken in the pandemic and there were many who fell through the gaps and missed out on support.

I note the additional £0.5 billion increase in the household support fund, which is welcome. Will my right hon. Friend set out to the House how he arrived at that figure and why he feels it will be adequate for the demand?

On the issue of inflation that my right hon. Friend raised, these transfer payments will stimulate the economy—granted, they will come with some tax increases as well—but will he share with the House his assessment of the inflationary impact of the announcement he has just made?

Finally, will my right hon. Friend appear before the Treasury Select Committee immediately after recess so that we can look at these matters in greater detail?

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his questions and for his thoughtful advice on how best the Government should respond to the current situation. We put extra support into the household support fund because, very specifically, the one group of those on means-tested benefits to whom we cannot deliver money automatically is those who receive only housing benefit, because that is administered by local authorities. That is the main group that needs that specific help, but of course there may well be others, which is why the fund is there.

On the inflationary impact, I believe it will be manageable, but my right hon. Friend is right to highlight it. That impact is why it is important that the support we provide is targeted where it can make the most difference, and that it is temporary and timely, and gets help to where it is required. That is the right approach: being fiscally responsible is going to help us to combat inflation in the long run.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesman, Kirsty Blackman.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is quite amusing to hear the Chancellor talk about this announcement being timely. I mean, it is timely: it just happens to have happened in the week of the Sue Gray report. It just happens that that report came out yesterday and the Chancellor has suddenly realised today that people are really struggling. He has suddenly realised that he needs to announce something.

At the spring statement, when the Chancellor announced the energy loan, he stood up and said, "Look at these amazing things that I am announcing." He genuinely seemed to believe at that time that that was the best this Government could do. Now, he has changed his mind. He has listened to the calls of the Opposition and of the people up and down these islands who are struggling, in many cases more than they have ever struggled before.

I do not understand why the Chancellor has announced only a £15 billion package. He has £28 billion of fiscal headroom in public sector net debt and £32 billion of fiscal headroom in balancing the current budget—those are the Office for Budget Responsibility's figures from March—yet he is refusing to spend that money now in the timely and targeted way that is needed for people now.

I am glad that the Chancellor announced money for the poorest households and that it has been targeted in that way, but it is not enough. What he has announced fails to uprate benefits; fails to account for the fact that the energy price cap that is coming in October will still be in place next year; and fails to ensure that benefits keep pace with inflation.

I have to laugh at the Chancellor's comments about inflation. Brexit has increased food prices by 6%. Brexit has done that. People who are struggling to meet the most basic costs—the majority of their costs are for energy and food—have been hit incredibly hard by Brexit. The poorest 10% of households are seeing a massive inflationary increase in comparison to the richest 10% of households, because of the percentage of their budget that is spent on energy and food. The Chancellor needs to uplift benefits as well as making payments.

It was pretty cheeky of the Chancellor to choose to include the £150 council tax payment in all the figures he read out. That went only to people who live in homes in bands A to D. It certainly did not go to all pensioners and certainly cannot be included in the money that is going to all pensioners. It cannot be included in the money that is going to all universal credit claimants, and it cannot be included in the money that is going to all disabled people. It cannot be included in the cost of this support package because it is absolutely not universal. On that point, the payment that we made in Scotland went to a higher percentage of households than the payment made in England.

This package does not go far enough. We are going to see an energy price increase of more than £1,000 for all households because of the increase in the energy price cap, yet the Chancellor is providing only £300 extra for pensioners. That will not even touch that £1,000 increase. He is only including these things. The uplift should have been 9%, to match inflation, and there should have been a further £25 uplift to universal credit and a further £25 uplift to legacy benefits. Lastly, he has failed in the uplift for disabled people, who face the very highest cost because of the increase in energy costs and in the cost of, for example, their diets.

I am glad that the Chancellor has put in place the windfall tax. I am very disappointed that it covers only oil and gas companies. It should have gone much wider. We have been calling for this since 2020, with Kate Forbes and Ben Macpherson. [Interruption.] The Labour party failed to support our amendment on this last week, so Labour Members are a bit cheeky as well in suggesting that we have not moved on this.



[Kirsty Blackman]

I would like the Chancellor to go further, to make a difference and to actually care about the poorest people in our society.

**Rishi Sunak:** I know that, for some people, it will never be enough. That is why the SNP's plans would leave Scotland with, I think, a 20% budget deficit and bankrupt the country. That is not something that we will ever do to the people of Scotland or the United Kingdom.

The hon Member's point on food prices was surprising and slightly puzzling, given I have just returned from a meeting of Finance Ministers from around the world where everyone was talking about increasing food prices. As far as I know, they did not all leave the European Union, but I will leave that to her.

The hon. Member talked about benefits uprating. Perhaps she did not understand exactly what we were announcing. What we are doing for those on means-tested benefits is more generous than uprating. On average, uprating would be worth just over £500, whereas the one-off payment is worth £650.

The hon. Member also talked about timing. She mentioned many things that have happened this week. The other thing that happened this week is that we heard from Ofgem, and we got more certainty on what the price cap will be in autumn. That is the single most important factor in trying to size the support that we are providing to people, because it is energy costs that are the biggest driver of the inflation that we are seeing now.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): When the Chancellor approved £150 billion of extra cash to be printed in November 2020 and gave a full guarantee against losses on the bonds, did he think that there could be any inflationary and public spending risk from that? I fully support giving back the huge windfall taxes that he is already collecting on energy, the VAT on fuel, the rip-off at the pumps and the much-enhanced profits tax coming from North sea oil and gas. That should be given back because people need some relief. On inflation, though, what did he think when he printed the money?

**Rishi Sunak:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question. He and I have talked about inflation for quite a while. He will know that I have long been concerned about the potential of rising inflation and interest rates. It is something that he and I discussed very early in my time in this job. That is why, from the beginning, I have been careful to protect our public finances against the costs of rising inflation and interest rates. I am glad that we took those decisions. Now, because of that, we are in a position to act and to support people.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I have a specific question about the household support fund. The Chancellor says—I think he is saying this—that, wherever people live, if they are in the same circumstances, they will get the same help from this fund. In other words, local authorities will have no control over how much money is spent from the fund. Will he therefore guarantee that councils will get pound for pound from the Government every pound they have to spend for the people who need it?

**Rishi Sunak:** No, that is not how the household support fund works. It has always been the request of colleagues in this House and indeed councils for that to be discretionary. What we generally tend to do is provide guidance on the types of people that we expect to have support, but leave the ultimate decision to those in local authorities. In this instance, for example, the particular priority ought to be those who receive only housing benefit. The fund is more than sized to deal not just with those, but with others. Ultimately, though, we leave the discretion to local authorities, with guidance provided by my colleagues at the Departments for Work and Pensions and for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): May I give the Chancellor an unreserved welcome for the help for ordinary citizens? I think now, cumulatively, it is worth north of £35 billion all told. However, may I raise two concerns? First, he talked about the risk of excessive fiscal stimulus. How does he reconcile that with the fact that the latest figures show that we are taking more money out of the economy than we ever have in history? Secondly, on the windfall tax, it will raise a small amount of money. Stability of tax and low tax both encourage investment and growth. Is there not a risk that the Exchequer will lose more in growth than it will gain in the windfall tax?

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. With regard to the figures on borrowing and stimulus, we are still running a relatively significant budget deficit this year—forecast to be 4% back in spring—so I would not regard that as a particularly tight policy on the fiscal side, and we will add further support today. With regard to tax, it is important to continue to support investment. The way we have designed the energy profits levy, with a doubling of the investment relief, will mean that companies still have a very strong incentive to invest in the North sea.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): People on pre-payment meters, many of whom are on the lowest incomes, are still paying more for their energy than people who pay by direct debit, and they are increasingly likely to self-disconnect to turn off the light and the warmth. When will the Government act to end this price discrimination against some of the least well-off members of our society?

**Rishi Sunak:** I know that my right hon. Friend the Energy Secretary is engaged with all the companies on how best to support people through this. With regard to the support that we have announced today, about 7% of households are on non-smart pre-payment meters and we want to make sure that we get their support to them. That has been taken into account and will be delivered through vouchers. The remaining pre-payment meters are smart, and the credit can be put straight on those meters so those people benefit.

**Laura Trott** (Sevenoaks) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, under Labour's plans, my most vulnerable constituents in Swanley, Westerham and elsewhere will receive £600, while under our plans they will receive £1,200?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is right. The combination of all the support that we have announced means that almost everybody on means-tested benefits should be in receipt of £1,200 of direct support from the Government. As she says, that is double the support offered by the Labour party.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): The word that occurs to me today is “Finally”. After months of proud families in this country, who have never needed help before, crying out for help from the Chancellor, pensioners sitting in cold houses in the winter because they could not afford to heat them, and families unable to put food on the table, this has come as too little, too late. Liberal Democrats were calling on the Chancellor to bring in a windfall tax on the excess profits of energy companies in October, when it could have made a difference in the winter. Instead, the Chancellor was hiking up taxes and adding to the national insurance burden of those already hardest hit. What I want to say to him today is this: will he listen next time, when from those on the Opposition Benches he gets an idea or suggestion that would help the people of this country, rather than hike up their taxes?

**Rishi Sunak:** Seventy per cent. of those in work will pay less tax this year than they did last year because of the changes that we have made. As I have said, now is the time to act because we have more certainty over what the price cap in the autumn will be. We are two thirds of the way through the observation window. Ofgem has given us a sense, which means that we can scale the support appropriately.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement. The shadow Chancellor made a very fair point: how are we going to fund this £15 billion? Is it not also fair to ask, on the basis that the windfall tax would raise about £3 billion by Labour’s calculations: how will Labour fund all the spending plans that it has announced today and on previous occasions, and the tax reductions that it has announced today and on previous occasions?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. On the last count, we have had, I think, £100 billion of spending commitments or tax reductions from the Labour party. Less than a tenth of that has been funded, despite the shadow Chancellor saying that she is committed to fiscal responsibility. It is the same old story with Labour. Ultimately, they always run out of other people’s money.

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): I congratulate the Chancellor on pinching some of our ideas. I really encourage him to look at the 17.5% VAT as well. One of my constituents sent me a copy of bills: January 2021, electricity £10,731.70; January 2022, £48,694.56. That is a 353.745% increase. How will the Chancellor’s statement today and his intervention help the businesses in my constituency because he seems to have left them out?

**Rishi Sunak:** With regard to businesses, we have the energy-intensive industries support scheme, which the Business Secretary is consulting on extending and improving the generosity of, to help the most energy-intensive industries in the country.

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): As the Chancellor knows, I have spoken in this House and privately to him against Labour’s proposals for a windfall tax—[*Interruption.*] I was waiting for the heckle. In my opinion, which I believe the Chancellor shares, they were entirely too blunt an instrument and frankly punitive for the sake of being punitive. I welcome his support for those most affected by the rising costs, his more targeted and specific approach to excess profits in the oil and gas industry and the relief on investment, which is already extensive, as he knows.

I have two questions. Can my right hon. Friend provide assurance that that charge will be applied to excess profits and that those will be distinguished from the increase in profits that would be expected in the natural cycle since the downturn of the past 12 years? Will he also commit to continuing the constructive dialogue with the industry that has been evident from this Government, in the interests of energy security and the transition to net zero?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is an excellent champion of the industry, and he is right to be so, because it is an important industry for the success of our future economy. It employs hundreds of thousands of people and it invests an enormous amount. We want to see that industry succeed and I know that, with his support and this Government’s, we will make sure that that happens.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): This statement may have put out the fires, or some of the fires, on the Back Benches behind the Chancellor, but it does not provide the comprehensive support and plan that these islands require. In a 22-minute statement, which began with an explanation of our rate of inflation, he forgot—or I presume he forgot—to mention Brexit, which has directly caused a 6% increase in food prices relative to international food prices and is the reason the International Monetary Fund expects UK inflation to remain far higher than that of the rest of the G7 for a prolonged period. We have heard the wholly inadequate firefighting today, but what is his plan for the medium to long term?

**Rishi Sunak:** As I spelled out, over the long term, through responsible fiscal policy, independent monetary policy and supply-side activism we will combat and reduce inflation. We are making progress on all three fronts.

**Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): I warmly welcome the Chancellor’s statement. He said that into the autumn he will think about tax cuts, which would be very welcome. Will he think about raising the income tax personal allowance for millions of hard-working families? It has been kept the same for the last two tax years, but in lifting it we would start to see those families able to take more of their income home with them, which is very much needed.

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is right that we want to ensure that our constituents keep more of their hard-earned money. That is why in July we will raise the national insurance primary threshold to equalise it with the income tax threshold—a tax cut for 30 million people, worth around £330 each.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor says he cannot solve every problem, but there is one problem he could solve that would not cost him a penny, but would save millions of people billions of pounds. One in 10 households say it is loan repayments that are causing them destitution, with an average monthly repayment to find of around £370. In the cost of living crisis, it is the legal loan sharks and consumer credit companies that have profited from the delay in help that we have seen and the lack of regulation of their charges. This is not just “buy now, pay later”—it is all of them. When will the Chancellor follow the lead of other countries, recognise how our constituents are being ripped off by those companies, and introduce a cap on the costs of all credit?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is in regular dialogue with the Financial Conduct Authority to ensure that the industry is properly regulated. Last year, we also introduced the breathing space programme, for which he deserves enormous praise and which we continue to believe will help people. It provides a space where all statutory debt repayments are paused to allow families time to work through them, with the benefits that that brings.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What difference in monetary policy has protected Japan and Switzerland from the levels of inflation that we are encountering here, in the United States and in the rest of Europe?

**Rishi Sunak:** Japan, as my right hon. Friend will appreciate, is a very particular case, but even Japan is experiencing its highest relative inflation rate in many years. For Switzerland, there are a couple of reasons. The first is a particularly strong Swiss franc, which happens at times like this. The second is a different mix of energy, which I believe from memory is provided overwhelmingly by hydro and nuclear. That is a completely different energy mix, which means that Switzerland suffers less from the shock we are experiencing.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): Almost five months after Labour called for a windfall tax on oil and gas producers to help seriously struggling Brits, I am glad that this out-of-touch, out-of-ideas Government have had that damascene conversion and performed today's screeching U-turn. However, it is already too late for many, including many of my constituents, who have been forced into destitution and had to choose between eating and heating. Talking of U-turns, will the Chancellor today perform another one by scrapping the national insurance tax hike? It is seriously hurting working people, and we are the only G7 country to be taxing working people so much that we now have the highest tax burden since the 1960s.

**Rishi Sunak:** Some 70% of people in work—including, I would imagine, the hon. Gentleman's constituents—will pay less tax this year than last year as a result of the increase in the national insurance primary threshold. That is delivering a tax cut to the vast majority of people, but it is right that those with broader shoulders help to contribute to funding the NHS properly, as it needs.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): There were two tasks for the Chancellor today. The first was to provide support for the poorest households, who are facing a period of extreme hardship, and on that front I think he has made all the right judgments. Direct payments are simple, easy to administer and non-recurring; the experience of doing something not dissimilar in the United States was generally positive. The second task, however, is to inject some confidence into the economy, which is facing a recession or a long period of stagnation. On that front, does he agree that we need a steady hand from the Bank of England, so that there is no further quantitative easing, with its inflationary pressures? We urgently need the supply-side reforms that he alluded to, we need delivery of the energy plan he and the Prime Minister have set out and we need to think about the tax burden in the years ahead. The Chancellor's announcement today is heavily redistributive; that is a good thing for hard-working families and the vulnerable, but it is being paid for by higher taxes on higher earners and businesses, and in the long term we need to address that.

**Rishi Sunak:** I agree wholeheartedly with my right hon. Friend. He makes excellent points, and he can expect me and this Government to deliver on all the things he thinks are important.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I welcome the recognition in the Chancellor's statement that benefit rates have fallen too low in real terms, given current inflation. Does he agree that it is time now to rethink the mechanism through which benefits are uprated—he has referred to the IT problems that have constrained him—and the level at which benefits are set?

**Rishi Sunak:** I am sure my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary is the best person to talk about the implementation of benefits, but the right hon. Gentleman will know that next year, benefits will most likely be uprated by September's consumer prices index, subject to review. That will mean a very significant increase in benefits next year, in excess of the rate of inflation, which will be very positive for those in receipt of them.

**Mrs Natalie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in addition to the vital, significant and welcome help with the cost of living, it is also important to continue to invest and create jobs in the economy? Will he join me in welcoming the £80 million investment made by the Treasury and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in the White Cliffs HMRC border facility, which will bring 400 jobs to Dover and Deal and help to secure customs and tax revenue, border control standards and the UK tax base?

**Rishi Sunak:** I know that is something my hon. Friend rightly cares passionately about for her community. She is right that the best way of helping people with the cost of living—indeed, the best way to help them to provide a better life for their families—is through well-paid work. That is why we are so focused on helping people into work and providing jobs. It is worth bearing in mind that someone moving off universal credit and into work is £6,000 a year better off. That is why we are wholeheartedly focused on moving people into work, and my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary deserves enormous credit for that.



**Dame Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): If the excess profits of the energy companies persist beyond this year, will the windfall tax persist? Will the Chancellor explain how the sunset clause works? Will he also explain why, when his super-deduction of 130% of investment has so far failed to spark the kind of investment he thought it would, he thinks a 90% investment allowance for the oil and gas companies will work?

**Rishi Sunak:** We will put a backstop sunset clause in the legislation with the energy profits levy. It will remain in place until prices return to a more normal level. In the past, that was specified specifically. We will take the time to get that right, but it will not be automatic in 12 months. It will depend on when prices return to a more normal level.

**Edward Timpson** (Eddisbury) (Con): Over and above the up to 30 hours of free childcare for three and four-year-olds and 15 hours for disadvantaged two-year-olds, there is also tax-free childcare that could help to alleviate the pressure of the cost of living for many families in Eddisbury and across the country, but only one in five eligible families take up the scheme. That has led to an underspend of about £2.5 billion over the past four years. What is my right hon. Friend going to do to help those families get the support they are entitled to to help them through this difficult time?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is rightly passionate about that subject, which he knows a lot about. Both the Education Secretary and the Exchequer Secretary are working hard to combat the low take-up of tax-free childcare. It is a generous benefit worth up to £2,000 a year and we want to make sure that everyone who can benefit from it does so.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): This is a significant intervention in the economy—there is absolutely no doubt about that—and the Chancellor has said it is for the whole of the UK, which is one of the reasons why we celebrate being Unionists. The Road Haulage Association has indicated that the cost of living is higher in Northern Ireland by 34%. With that in mind, can the Chancellor confirm that the measures announced today apply to Northern Ireland without exception and whether the EU will have to be consulted about any of the measures before they apply?

**Rishi Sunak:** As I said, when it comes to all the direct payments through the welfare system, we will take legislative powers to deliver them directly in Northern Ireland, where we believe we have the operational capacity to do so. As for the support for energy bills in the autumn, we are open to exploring how best to deliver that support to those in Northern Ireland. Ordinarily it would be Barnettted—it is worth £165 million—because, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the energy market is separate to that in the rest of Great Britain, but if there is a way for us to deliver that support directly, we are open to doing so. We just need to see whether there is a mechanism to do so.

**Sir Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The London Borough of Bromley has the highest percentage of pensioner households in the whole of Greater London, and my right hon. Friend's well-targeted initiative will be very much welcomed by my constituents.

Equally, of course, in the longer term, inflation is a threat to their pensions and fixed incomes. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that as well as dealing with the immediate pressures now, we will pursue a policy of non-inflationary growth? Above all, that must surely come from market and other reforms to improve our comparatively low level of productivity. Will he make that a priority going forward?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I know that he is a champion for pensioners in his constituency. I hope that he will be pleased by today's news that they will receive an extra £300 this winter to help get them through. His point about the long run is right. My belief is that if we can get businesses to invest more, train more and innovate more, spurred on by tax reductions and reforms this autumn, we will be able to drive up our growth and productivity.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the fact that the Chancellor has accepted many of Labour's calls, but my constituent who is on £1,300 take-home pay and pays a rent of £800, council tax of £100, debt repayments of £100 a month, travel costs of £100 a month and fuel costs of £200 a month is left with nothing to eat with. He is ineligible for universal credit and because he lives in a block of rented flats where the landlord redistributes the fuel, he will also be ineligible for the fuel rebate. Will the Chancellor confirm to councils that their discretionary money must prioritise people who live in park homes or who receive their fuel from their landlords, so that they can get support as well, because they are currently excluded?

**Rishi Sunak:** I am very happy to take away that suggestion when we design the guidance for the discretionary fund.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): It will come as no surprise to the House that I have had my concerns about the implementation of a windfall tax on the oil and gas industry, so I thank the Chancellor for his engagement with me and colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), and for resisting the ideologically driven smash-and-grab raid proposed by Labour. I also thank him for doubling the investment allowance to encourage people to invest in the North sea. There is still worry in the industry and in my constituency, so will the Chancellor commit to come to the north-east of Scotland to meet me and industry leaders to ensure that we retain the higher skill, high-wage jobs in my part of the world and ensure that we invest in an industry that is driving us towards net zero and making us more energy independent.

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is a champion for the industry and is right to be so. I am happy to come and meet him and representatives from the sector, because I share his view that the industry is an important part of our economy and of our future. As he said, it helps us transition to net zero and improve our energy supply.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The SNP supports action—at last—on a windfall tax. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) pointed out, we first called for that in 2020. Energy companies, which are disproportionately based in Scotland,

[Kirsten Oswald]

are not the only businesses to make excess profits during the pandemic and the crisis period. Did the Chancellor not give any consideration to expanding the tax to other companies that are unfairly benefiting from significantly higher business, such as Serco or Amazon, to make sure that Scotland does not carry a disproportionate burden of funding a UK-wide response?

**Rishi Sunak:** No, we are not giving consideration to that. As I said, we are giving consideration to excess energy profits being made in other parts of the sector, on the generation side. As I said, we will examine the scale of that challenge and the right steps to address it.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): I warn my right hon. Friend that throwing red meat to socialists by raising taxes on businesses and telling them where to invest their money is not the Conservative way of encouraging those who create our prosperity and jobs to do just that. Does he agree that by setting this bar we are in danger, were we ever to lose power, of allowing the socialists to raise it, which they would do with relish again, again, and again?

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my hon. Friend. What I would say to him is that I believe that a pragmatic and compassionate Conservative Government would act to provide support to the most vulnerable at a time of great need and that a fiscally responsible Conservative Government would look to try to fund as much of that as possible in as fair a way as possible.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Recent research by 38 Degrees has shown that in Feltham and Heston, 68% of the population are experiencing more expensive energy bills, 78% are experiencing more expensive groceries and 25% have seen household incomes cut by the cut to universal credit. That has had a massive impact on the wellbeing of families and their confidence in the future, and in being able to feed and clothe themselves and pay their rent. Landlords in blocks such as Trinity Square in my constituency have massively increased tenants' energy bills. Can I take it from the Chancellor's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) that he will ensure that landlords and housing associations pass on the benefits to the hard-working families that urgently need the support?

**Rishi Sunak:** I am fairly certain that my colleagues the Energy Secretary and Housing Secretary previously engaged with landlords' associations to ensure that they passed on the benefit and I am happy to talk to them to make sure that they do the same thing again.

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I welcome the measures, although I sense that my right hon. Friend will need to keep the situation under constant review with further measures possibly required, such as a social tariff and support for those on prepayment meters, as well as initiatives to trigger significant investment in energy efficiency. Transitioning and renewable energy in the North sea is bringing good long-term jobs to coastal communities such as Waveney. I urge him to work with

energy companies, as he has indicated that he will, to ensure that their investment is maximised and not undermined.

**Rishi Sunak:** I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance and to work with him and the industry, because we want to create a pro-investment environment. On energy efficiency, we are investing £6 billion over the course of this Parliament to improve the energy efficiency of public sector buildings and individual people's homes.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): In his statement, the Chancellor rightly raised his concern, as we all have in this House, about the number of people eligible for pension credit who are not claiming it. The latest figures suggest that £1.5 billion in pension credit is unclaimed. That is not something we should have going forward, so will he indicate whether the Government will now look at a proper take-up strategy for pension credit, or is the grant that he has mentioned today perhaps the way forward?

**Rishi Sunak:** I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is constantly ensuring that those entitled to those benefits do get them, and I am sure she will keep everything under review.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): There is ample evidence that the big retailers, which dominate the nation's forecourts, have not passed on the cut in fuel duty, and we know that from the Platts price. I urge the Chancellor to take action to put pressure on these companies, but given our experience in this matter, does that not rather underline the fact that we Conservatives understand that there are enormous difficulties in interfering in the marketplace and that the best way to help people is an overall reduction in the tax burden?

**Rishi Sunak:** While I broadly agree with my right hon. Friend that that is the best way to help people over time, in a particular circumstance such as this, and given the types of people we are trying to help, I believe that direct cash transfers are the right way, rather than going through the tax system. I have talked to my right hon. Friend the Energy Secretary about the issue that my right hon. Friend raises. He is right to raise it, and I know that the Energy Secretary is focused on ensuring that the fuel duty cut is passed on.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Does the Chancellor now admit that he got it wrong in excluding disabled people from the warm home discount, which excluded 210,000 people who desperately needed help? Can I have confirmation that this announcement means that those 210,000 people are now eligible?

**Rishi Sunak:** The warm home discount is an existing scheme that covers only 3 million households. It is also funded by other billpayers. What we are doing today is setting out Exchequer-funded support to all those on means-tested benefits, so that anyone on those benefits will benefit from the £650. Additionally, those in receipt of any other disability benefits, which are non-means-tested, will receive £150.

**Saqib Bhatti** (Meriden) (Con): I thank the Chancellor for this package. Clearly he is a Chancellor who listens and a Chancellor who does. Will he confirm that this

Government will continue to focus on energy sector reform, so that we can meaningfully reduce the impact of energy costs on household bills in Meriden and across the country in the medium and long term?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why the Business Secretary and the Prime Minister announced the plan to reform the energy market so that we can reduce those bills over time and also double down on our initiatives to improve the energy efficiency of people's homes, which can save them £200 or £300 relatively quickly.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): The windfall tax amounts to just £5 billion, but it could have been well over double that and still left North sea oil and gas giants with the same profit levels they have had in recent years, before they benefited from this price spike. Surely the Chancellor should be doing everything he can to help people who are struggling, so why is he still letting oil and gas companies keep billions in undeserved profits?

**Rishi Sunak:** I think that the official Labour party view is that the windfall tax would raise £2 billion. The way we have structured ours means it will in fact raise £5 billion, which is a significant amount of revenue that will help fund the things we have announced today.

**Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I particularly welcome the support that my right hon. Friend is giving to those most impacted by this surge in inflation. As part of his excellent statement, he highlighted supply-side reforms that will be most important in the medium term but will take some time to come through. Could he perhaps give a little more information about those supply-side reforms that he is intending?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend speaks with experience on this matter, given his previous roles.

I will give a couple of examples. One we have touched on, which is energy supply and making sure that we can improve it, but there is also the labour market, which we know is tight. That is why it is important that we move people off welfare and into work and reform high-skill migration. Beyond that, we will go after all opportunities across all sectors where we can deregulate and improve our productive capacity.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): On the Chancellor's watch, we have had 15 tax rises, and this year the UK is the only G7 country to be raising taxes on working people. He has known for months that our constituents are going hungry, sitting in the cold, worried sick about their bills and facing the biggest fall in their living standards since the 1950s. Why did it take the Prime Minister's boozy lawbreaking being all over the news for him to finally impose a windfall tax on the bumper profits of energy companies?

**Rishi Sunak:** Well, we did act, and that is why there is already £21 billion of support to help people with the cost of living this year. We are adding £15 billion to that today, after having more certainty about what energy bills will be in the autumn, and that is why we have acted now.

**Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): The consumer champion and money saving expert Martin Lewis met

the Chancellor on Monday, and he has published a series of requests that he was making upon the Chancellor. He has since stated:

"Wow just reading this back, I think he was listening!"

Will my right hon. Friend continue to meet consumer champions and respected individuals, such as Martin Lewis, who can provide independent assessments of policymaking and judgments on behalf of some of the most vulnerable in society? Does he further recognise that while we have two countries at war in Europe that are either large food producers or large energy providers, there will always be a time when we will not be able to answer everyone's demands?

**Rishi Sunak:** My right hon. Friend makes some excellent points, particularly his macroeconomic point about the geopolitics that we are experiencing at the moment. I am happy to give him my assurance that I will continue to engage with consumer champions such as Martin Lewis. He has provided thoughtful and interesting suggestions, and I hope he will see that many of those have been met in the package we have announced today.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Why has the Chancellor not provided additional targeted support to the half a million communal heating system customers who are not protected by the energy price cap?

**Rishi Sunak:** We have not changed the structure of how the price cap works—it covers what it covers. But what we have done is provide discretionary funding—already half a billion pounds this year between spring and autumn, and now an additional half a billion pounds from October through to next spring—to pick up all those who might be in particular circumstances that need additional assistance.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): May I welcome the Chancellor's economic package? It is thoughtful, innovative and incredibly generous—much more so than some of the ideas that some are saying he has taken from the Opposition.

Last week, I met our fantastic citizens advice team, who work so hard locally. They had a number of measures, and he has delivered on them all. There is one remaining: they were concerned that one-off payments, generous as they are, can sometimes be difficult for people with particular challenges to manage. Will he look at that in the roll-out and ensure that we can help the people who perhaps need it the most?

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my hon. Friend for his support and join him in paying tribute to our fantastic citizens advice bureaux for the fantastic work they do. He makes a good point, which is one reason why the payment will be staggered into two tranches. It will not come all in one go: the first tranche will come in July and the second later in the autumn. That will help to address the issue that he raised.

**Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): Energy-intensive businesses and sectors such as automotive manufacturing are facing huge challenges due to soaring energy prices. Companies such as Vauxhall in Luton South need some specific support to keep plants running efficiently and



[Rachel Hopkins]

to keep people in skilled jobs. Can I hear from the Chancellor a commitment to our manufacturing sector and what support he will provide to it, as it is so critical to our UK economy?

**Rishi Sunak:** I do believe that the sector is important to our future, which is why it is being supported with a very significant tax incentive to invest with the super deduction, which we have said we will replace when it expires next spring with further support. Indeed, our energy-intensive industries benefit from around £2 billion of direct intervention with their energy bills.

**Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con):** I welcome this statement from my right hon. Friend. In particular, I welcome the increase in the household support fund. This targeted intervention is exactly what people need. It will be going through the councils, which we have relied on in the past to distribute these funds, notably during the covid crisis. Will he have conversations with our councils to ensure that they have the resources they need for any extra work they need to do? Will he join me in thanking them in advance for the work that they will be doing on this?

**Rishi Sunak:** As a former local government Minister, I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to our councils for the fantastic work they did during covid and continue to do to support their residents, our constituents, through the challenges ahead. I am happy to tell her that we have a new burdens formula that compensates councils, when it is triggered, with the funding they need.

**Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP):** I do not know if the Chancellor has been to Scotland recently, but I reassure him that we will not be taking any lectures from him on Scotland's viability as an independent state, sitting as he is on £2.2 trillion of sovereign debt built up by him and the Labour party.

On today's announcement, what discussions has the Chancellor had with upstream oil and gas manufacturers such as Halliburton and Baker Hughes in my constituency about their future? There is a sunset clause that protects energy companies and reduces the burden when prices come down, but where is the sunset clause for ordinary households? How can they know how long their support will last?

**Rishi Sunak:** As ever, we keep all situations under review with regard to providing support to households. We know, however, that the most vulnerable are likely, subject to the review of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, to see a significant increase in welfare and pension payments next year, based on September's CPI, which will be significantly in excess of the inflation forecast for that year.

**Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** The Chancellor's £15 billion package will make a massive difference to a lot of people in Dudley South, but can he tell me what distributional analysis he has done on that package? How does that compare with the impact of abolishing VAT on domestic energy?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. We have published a distributional analysis today, which I point him to, which shows that the package that

we have announced is extremely progressive in nature, with those on the lowest incomes benefiting most. Some three quarters of what we have announced will go to the most vulnerable households, including pensioners. A flat rate payment has the benefit of being more progressive than VAT, which obviously gives very high, or higher, tax discounts to those who are particularly wealthy or have large houses and energy bills.

**Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab):** In acknowledging the Government's long-overdue U-turns today, we should be clear that the delay has cost people dearly. I relay to the Chancellor that this week, a local housing association told me that it is seeing under-25-year-olds, who are shamefully paid a lower rate of universal credit, using it all on gas and electric bills that are made worse by sky-high standing charges, which account for £3.50 out of every £10 and are particularly high in south Wales. What is he doing to address those long-term issues?

**Rishi Sunak:** The Energy Secretary is engaged in a conversation with the industry, the Competition and Markets Authority and others about ensuring that our energy market works fairly for consumers. I know that he will treat those matters as a priority.

**Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con):** Is not a huge risk of increasing tax on businesses that they will seek to pass that increased overhead back to consumers? Although the energy price cap will protect people on mains gas and stop that happening to them, a huge proportion of households and businesses in my constituency rely on domestic heating oil and liquefied petroleum gas. What mechanism will my right hon. Friend put in place to ensure that businesses with a higher tax burden do not seek to pass that cost back to those consumers?

**Rishi Sunak:** In general, the evidence from previous iterations shows that that does not happen, mainly because those commodities are traded at international prices, so the domestic tax regime does not change the price that is being passed on, but I am happy to take my hon. Friend's point away.

**Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab):** The Chancellor talked about supporting the most vulnerable, but there appear to be questions about his targeting when we look at the detail in the announcement. Everybody accepts that the most effective way to get support to those most in need would be to restore the universal credit uplift and extend that to those on legacy benefits. Why is he ideologically opposed to the action that would have made the biggest difference to the hardest hit?

**Rishi Sunak:** Again, perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not hear what I said. We are extending the support to all those on means-tested benefits, not just those on universal credit, who account for less than half of all households on means-tested benefits. What we are doing is more comprehensive than what he is suggesting and, in fact, it is more generous, because £650 of support is more generous than uprating, which in aggregate, on average, would be worth only just over £500.

**Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con):** Since 2011, the basic state pension has gone up by 35%. Today, pensioners across Grantham and Stamford are seeing additional support at this very difficult time. Does the

Chancellor agree that, ultimately, we need to improve the culture of saving for a pension in this country, so that pensioners are well prepared for future challenges?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is thoughtful on that topic, and he is right. Previous Governments have reformed auto-enrolment to bring about that change in culture. The advantage that we are seeing now, with financial technology making it far easier for people to access and direct savings, means that we should only see that grow, and we will help to encourage it.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): I am sure the U-turn Chancellor will join me in congratulating the architect of one of his previous U-turns, Marcus Rashford, on his recent engagement. Rashford's campaigning on free school meals reminded us all how vital it is that every child gets a decent hot meal every day at a time when families are struggling to put food on the table. While food prices have risen by almost 7% in the last year, however, funding for infant free school meals has risen by just 4p since they were introduced by the Liberal Democrats in Government in 2014. How does the Chancellor recommend that schools make up the shortfall—by cutting portions for hungry children, or by sacking teachers?

**Rishi Sunak:** We are continuing to put record amounts into schools' budgets—more than £14 billion over the next few years. We hear a lot from Opposition parties about the tax burden, but we are actually funding public services. It is incumbent on all those who are calling for even more investment in our schools and our NHS to at least say how they would fund that.

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I very much welcome the additional measures announced today, which will help many families across Stoke-on-Trent South. There is one industry, however, that is in need of more support: many ceramics producers in Stoke-on-Trent have not been eligible for much of the support announced in the energy security strategy. Will my right hon. Friend look at further support that could be offered, particularly to ceramics producers in Stoke-on-Trent?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is a brilliant champion for the ceramics industry in Stoke. I have been pleased to meet him and his constituents on multiple occasions. This is something that the Energy Secretary is looking at to ensure that our support for energy-intensive industries gets to the people who need it most, and I will happily mention this to him.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): By doubling onshore wind capacity, £6 billion could be saved on household bills. It would also reduce our dependence on imported energy, contribute to our net zero targets and create thousands of jobs. Is the Chancellor still blocking the development of onshore wind?

**Rishi Sunak:** If the hon. Lady looks at the energy security strategy that the Prime Minister and the Energy Secretary published, she will see that there is a section specifically about more onshore wind, with the consent of communities, and making sure that they benefit from that development.

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): With the big increases in energy prices and other bills, my right hon. Friend is correct to bring forward these further comprehensive proposals to help the most vulnerable people. This response is rooted in Conservative values, and is better targeted at those most in need than the proposals put forward by Labour. Will he bring that strong focus to delivering the investment, growth and supply-side reform that we need?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is right that this intervention accords with our values by supporting those most in need at a time of acute distress, but he is also right to focus on the long term. The best way to help people over time and sustainably is to ensure that we have a growing economy with more jobs, higher wages and better skills. That is what we will deliver.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): After the Chancellor's previous announcement of the £150 council tax rebate and the £200 energy bill rebate, 6.5 million households were still classed as fuel-poor. That is 6.5 million households where people will be ill and more likely to die early. With the cap rising to £2,800 in October, there are predicted to be 12 million fuel-poor households. Some of today's measures are very welcome, but they will just keep the most vulnerable standing still. How many more millions of households will go into fuel poverty in October because of his lack of real action?

**Rishi Sunak:** As I have said, it will be a difficult time, given the degree of shock that we are seeing to energy prices. We know that energy bills will, on average, will increase by about £1,200 this year. Roughly, most of the 8 million most vulnerable households should receive support worth around £1,200.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The Chancellor and the Government are absolutely right to recognise that more needs to be done, but I suggest to him that generally, lower taxes bring forward greater prosperity over the medium to longer term. As high inflation will be less transitory than many believed—banks were saying only a few months ago that it would be transitory—will he consider raising the minimum wage above inflation to help the lowest paid, given that unemployment is at a record low, and scrapping the corporation tax increases to help industry pay for that?

**Rishi Sunak:** I am proud that the minimum wage has gone up significantly this year, which puts £1,000 extra into people's paycheques. Actually, we have a long-term target to increase it to two thirds of median earnings, which will ensure that it tends to rise faster than inflation in normal times, but I am happy to work with my hon. Friend on making that happen.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor is slowing one crisis while accelerating another: the climate crisis. Why is he investing in hydrocarbons, which should be staying in the ground, instead of investing in retrofitting properties, which would ultimately save energy costs, as Labour has proposed, and would make a real difference to people's energy bills?

**Rishi Sunak:** Unlike the Labour party, we believe in the North sea and in our domestic energy industry. It employs hundreds of thousands of people, and it will help us to increase our energy security, and to transition

[*Rishi Sunak*]

to net zero. That is why it is wrong to stigmatise it and absolutely right to support it, and to support its investment ambitions as we do.

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): The Chancellor is of course aware that some 20% of households in Wales are not connected to the mains gas grid, and in rural areas such as Ceredigion that proportion is significantly higher. Will he confirm that the £400 grant he announced today will apply to off-grid homes, and if so, what if anything will those people need to do to receive the support?

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Gentleman raised this recently, rightly. As a rural MP, I share his concerns. The energy bill rebate is based on electricity metered, rather than gas, so it will apply both to his constituents and to mine.

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for his statement; the constituents of Newport West will be grateful that he has acted to help them in some small way at long last. However, can he confirm that only those who are already receiving benefits or who started a claim before 25 May will get the first instalment of the £650 he outlined in his statement? Am I right in thinking that this means that a woman leaving an abusive relationship today and needing to claim for the first time will not get this instalment?

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Lady is right that there is of course an eligibility date deadline so that we can process one-off payments, but that is part of the reason why we have staggered the payments in two tranches: to make sure that we catch those who arrive on to the welfare bill between those payments. There will be a stretch period between them to catch as many of those people as possible.

**Taiwo Owatemi** (Coventry North West) (Lab): For months now, I have been telling the Chancellor about the financial struggles that many families in my constituency of Coventry North West have been facing. This autumn, families face an energy cap rise of more than £800, which comes on top of record-high inflation. Can the Chancellor honestly tell each and every one of my constituents that today's announcement is the right decision at the right time? From where I am standing, this feels like a classic example of too little, too late.

**Rishi Sunak:** This is the right decision at the right time. We are providing up to £1,200 of support to the most vulnerable third of households in this country. As I have said, that is roughly similar to the average energy bill increase that we are likely to experience over this year.

**Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Can the Chancellor tell me if the Treasury has estimated the basic cost of living per week for a single adult, and for different-sized households—yes or no? If it has, how much is it?

**Rishi Sunak:** I am not sure that I followed the hon. Gentleman's question, but I know that while many families are facing difficult times, we are providing significant support for them—in total, £37 billion, or

1.5% of GDP. The support we announced today and in February is worth up to £1,200 for a typical vulnerable household—a third of the country.

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): In my Liverpool, Riverside constituency, 10 children in a class of 30 are living in poverty, with two thirds living in working families on poverty wages. The targeted one-off payment does not go far enough. Does the Chancellor not agree that increasing welfare benefits in line with inflation and lifting the two-child cap will tackle this problem long term, whereas what he proposes today is a sticking plaster on a gaping wound?

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Lady may not have heard what I said the last few times I answered this question. What we are doing is more generous than uprating. Uprating is worth on average just over £500; the one-off payment we are providing is £650.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): A number of Members today have drawn attention to the fact that the standing charge on prepayment meters is one of the most inequitable aspects of the entire domestic energy system, and removing it is a key ask in the letter that the Chancellor will have received from the Scottish Finance Secretary yesterday. When will he get together with the Energy Secretary, the energy companies, the regulators and anyone else concerned to bang heads together and remove this unfair charge?

**Rishi Sunak:** As I have said, the Energy Secretary is extensively engaged with both Ofcom and the industry to make sure that we can support people in the best way.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Chancellor very much for his statement and for the substantial financial help, which is most welcome. Northern Ireland will directly benefit, as he has said, and I thank him for that. Will the Chancellor confirm that there is a mechanism that ensures the funding goes to the working poor who are on the threshold of universal credit, but do not quite make it? Will he consider realigning the threshold for universal credit with the inflation rate, which would enable those on the border of poverty to stay on their feet and not be knocked over?

**Rishi Sunak:** That is why, as well as the very generous support for those on means-tested benefits, we have put in place universal support to ensure that all households receive an extra £200 on top of the £200 we have announced. That will help those people, as will the discretionary fund that we have established.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): It is right that those companies making billions in excess profits should contribute more tax in these difficult times, and the Chancellor recognised that today by announcing a windfall tax on oil and gas companies. Disappointingly, Labour has been strangely silent on the huge profits made by other big businesses such as Amazon, even though that company's tax-to-turnover rate is a shameful 0.37%. Can the Chancellor tell us why large corporations such as Amazon, which made billions during the pandemic, are not subject to this windfall tax? If they were, more help could be given to more people.



**Rishi Sunak:** I am proud that this Government worked to agree a new international taxation agreement, signed by over 130 countries, so that we can tax the profits of large digital companies more fairly. That will come into effect in the coming months and years. It is something we should all be proud of and can all get behind. I believe that the Labour party opposes the policy and would scrap that treaty.

**Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab): My borough of Enfield has the 11th highest rate of child poverty in the country, and one in five people are on low pay. While the Chancellor has been dragged kicking and screaming to an inevitable outcome, families have been suffering for months. The measures today are welcome, but they need to be delivered efficiently and effectively. Can the Chancellor therefore outline what steps he will take to speed up the painfully slow council tax rebate, which is causing significant distress to my constituents?

**Rishi Sunak:** I know councils are working as hard as they can to get the payments to people, and we of course remain engaged with them, to help provide the support that they need to do that as fast as possible.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I thank the Chancellor of the Exchequer for his swift answers to the questions following his statement.

## Point of Order

1.58 pm

**Dame Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Yesterday, during the Prime Minister's statement on the Sue Gray report, my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David) asked if anyone in Downing Street received a copy of the report the night before it was officially sent to Downing Street, and whether any edits were made. The Prime Minister said he did not receive the report in advance, but did not answer the question about whether anyone else in Downing Street did. There has since been further speculation that an official who did was the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay), who doubles up as the Prime Minister's chief of staff. Given his unique position as a Member of this House, a member of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister's chief of staff, may I seek your guidance about whether it would be in order for me to table a named day question asking if he received a copy of the Sue Gray report in advance, and whether he sought, either successfully or unsuccessfully, to make amendments to it?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for having given me notice of her intention to raise that point of order. It is of course open to her to table a written question. If she is considering doing so, she would be best advised to talk to the Clerks in the Table Office, who will be more than happy to give her advice, but she will of course be aware that questions require a factual basis, not just media speculation. *[Interruption.]* We do not need any commentary on this; I am answering the point of order. I know the hon. Lady appreciates that such a question would require a factual basis and of course it would need to entail a degree of ministerial responsibility, because that is what makes Ministers accountable to the House at the Dispatch Box. I am sure the Clerks in the Table Office will be able to advise her appropriately and I hope that that answer is helpful to her.

## Address to Her Majesty: Platinum Jubilee

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I would like to make a brief statement on behalf of the Speaker in relation to the Humble Address celebrating Her Majesty the Queen's platinum jubilee.

The Speaker says:

"The House will be aware that I am absent as I am travelling to the Falkland Islands for a long-planned visit to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the war there.

I had hoped—and passed on my hope to the Government—that the debate on the Humble Address might have been scheduled for an earlier day so as to avoid the clash, but for reasons I do not fully understand that has not been possible.

Therefore, I hope the House will understand that I want to put on record that no disrespect is intended by my absence; indeed, I look forward to celebrating the jubilee in the Falkland Islands, where, in the words of the chair of the legislative assembly, 'our distance only serves to strengthen the feelings of gratitude, love and respect that we have for Her Majesty The Queen.'

I would like to give my own short tribute to Her Majesty, the Duke of Lancaster. Most Gracious Sovereign: we, your faithful House of Commons, offer our heartfelt congratulations on the completion of 70 years of your reign. We, too, are pleased to have contributed to the jubilee lamps in New Palace Yard to symbolise the enduring and guiding light you have been to our nation and indeed the whole world.

Not only has Your Majesty been a constant presence in the lives of most of your subjects, but you are also the third-longest serving monarch in world history, and the first in this country to achieve a platinum jubilee—which is an incredible feat.

Your long and distinguished reign has seen extraordinary changes at home and in the wider world. The United Kingdom of 1952 would be unrecognisable today. Back then, the country was making tentative steps towards rebuilding and recovering from the ravages of the second world war, while today we are grateful to our NHS for leading us through the pandemic and look warily upon the war in Ukraine and the shockwaves it has delivered across the globe.

We have moved at lightning speed from rationing through to the jet age, to the space age, to the digital age. The nature of society has changed dramatically too, as today we are richly multicultural and multifaith, celebrating diversity and equality, making this country not only a vibrant and exciting place to live but one that is proud its people can be true to themselves.

Our place in the world has also changed during this time. Seventy years ago, this Parliament was at the heart of an empire; today we are one of 54 independent members of the Commonwealth, of which you are head. We are no longer members of the European Union, and we have chosen to delegate powers to the devolved Parliaments of Scotland and Wales as well as the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The House of Commons today looks rather different from that of 1952, too. We have 13 times as many women Members, from 17 female MPs in 1951 to 225 in 2022, and it is also a younger House.

Without doubt, your lengthy reign and experience, your sage advice and your devotion to the UK, the British overseas territories and the Commonwealth of Nations has been of particular benefit to all 14 Prime Ministers who have served you over the years.

Platinum is the appropriate epithet for this jubilee: it is one of the purest of the precious metals; it is rare, durable and enormously valued. For 70 years, Your Majesty has profoundly demonstrated all these qualities. On behalf of all the Members of the House of Commons, may I thank you wholeheartedly for all that you have done, are doing and will do for the good of our country."

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

2.6 pm

**The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson):** I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty to offer the heartfelt good wishes and loyal devotion of the House on the occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of Her Accession to the Throne, expressing its deep gratitude for Her Majesty's lifelong unstinting service, leadership and commitment to the United Kingdom, Dependencies and Territories, Her other Realms, and the Commonwealth.

Since the Palace of Westminster was founded more than 1,000 years ago, it has seen war and peace, plague and plenty, the rise and fall of empires, all kinds of revolutions—scientific, industrial, political, ecumenical, stylistic—and almost 50 monarchs. In trying to rank the achievements of those monarchs, it must be admitted that not all of them set exemplary standards of personal behaviour, and quite a few were removed violently and prematurely from office, but in our history no monarch has ever served this country so long as this one, with the first platinum jubilee ever. Far more importantly, no monarch has ever served it so well.

When Barack Obama was asked at the end his time as President which world leader had impressed him most, he paused, his mind doubtless running through the gallery of contemporary figures, and said "Queen Elizabeth" and I believe he was right. That is why next week the people of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth will be unabashed in celebrating not just the institution of the Crown, but the individual who wears it: this remarkable woman, who, by God and her right, has led her country through good times and bad, who has dedicated her life to her people, to her beloved Commonwealth, and to the very idea of what a constitutional monarchy should be, and who has already racked up so many superlatives, some of which the Speaker has already referred to.

In her 25,677 days as Queen, Her Majesty has undertaken more than 21,000 official engagements in well over 100 countries. She has granted Royal Assent to some 4,000 pieces of legislation sent to her by this House, hosted 112 state visits and been served by 14 British Prime Ministers—so far. Across all her realms, she has offered counsel and wisdom to more than 170 Heads of Government, including two generations of Trudeau—so far. She is the holder of at least seven world records, including the most summer Olympiads opened by one person, although at only one such ceremony did she parachute out of a helicopter, in a pink dress. Of course, there was one Olympic medal ceremony where she could claim to have bred both the rider, the Princess Royal, and the horse—a claim that will likely go unrivalled for some time to come. If we needed evidence of the mark she has made on our capital city, not one but two London transport lines have been named in her honour.

It is not so much what she has done as the way she has done it: getting the best out of people; inspiring them to serve others and their communities; helping to create that invisible thread of pride and allegiance that tugs on all our hearts and makes us happy to serve, or at least to do something for, our country in the way that she serves this country.

I know that Prime Ministers are not supposed to relay their conversations with the Queen, and I will not, except to say that her knowledge and understanding of politics and world affairs is profound.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Hear, hear.

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows whereof he speaks. There have been times when I have been scrabbling to remember a historical date or the name of some African capital, and she has got there first. When it comes to some subjects—anything equestrian—I am simply nowhere.

I bet I speak for every Prime Minister who has ever had an audience with Her Majesty when I say that our conversations are always immensely comforting, because she has seen the sweep of it. She has seen the cycle from gloom to elation, and every time her country, under her, has gone forward from strength to strength. She has seen an empire transformed into a happy Commonwealth that countries are now bidding to join.

In the thousand-year history of this place, no monarch has seen such an increase in the longevity, prosperity or opportunity—or the freedom—of the British people. No monarch has seen such technical advances, in many of which British scientists have played a leading part, from the dawn of the internet to the use of the world's first approved covid vaccine. No monarch, by their efforts, dedication and achievement, better deserves the attribute of greatness. For me, she is already Elizabeth the Great.

While she remains resolutely supported by the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cambridge and other members of the royal family, we know that these celebrations will be tinged with sadness for Her Majesty by the absence of the Duke of Edinburgh, her strength and stay. And so I hope that in the coming days, we can together further comfort and reassure her, and show with every bonfire, every concert and street party, and every aerobatic display a love and devotion to reciprocate the love, devotion and leadership she has shown to the whole country over seven decades.

On behalf of the whole House, let me say, as the scholars of Westminster cried out from the abbey's triforium on coronation day 70 years ago, "Vivat Regina Elizabetha!"—God save Queen Elizabeth.

2.14 pm

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): May I second the motion, and associate myself and my party with the sentiments expressed by the Prime Minister? It is an honour to humbly address Her Majesty on such a momentous occasion.

This is the first platinum jubilee for a British monarch—the longest reigning monarch our country has ever had. Her Majesty is the personification of our nation's great history. At the time of her coronation in 1953, our country was emerging into a new age: the war behind us; new opportunities ahead. As it is now, Britain was at a crossroads, forging a new chapter in our history. Her Majesty has been so much part of that history that it is almost impossible to imagine Britain without her. There have been 14 Prime Ministers, but Her Majesty has remained a constant. When historians look back on our Elizabethan age, they will write of how her commitment to her people, her dedication to duty, her steely resolve made her the perfect monarch for the people and the times she led.

I have been honoured with the pleasure of meeting Her Majesty, most recently when I became a Privy Counsellor, as the Health Secretary knows. I also have

the unique experience of being grateful for a time when Her Majesty was otherwise occupied. For the son of a toolmaker and a nurse growing up in a town just outside the M25, being invited to Buckingham Palace to receive a knighthood was never really in the script. It was an incredibly special moment. My parents said it was the proudest day of their lives. But there was a catch: my parents couldn't bear leaving their dog at home. So in the car that drove through the gates of Buckingham Palace were my mum, my dad and our family dog—not some small dog, but a Great Dane—barking so loudly that the car almost shook from side to side. The image of the Queen's corgis coming face to face with him flashed through my mind. To this day, I am grateful to the royal guard my dad persuaded to watch over our dog during the ceremony: he had an audience with our family dog so that my parents could have an audience with Prince Charles.

Her Majesty is the most famous face on the planet. Her commitment to her people can be seen in everything she does. She has been on more than 150 visits to her beloved Commonwealth, and wherever she goes she is a beacon of the British spirit. Our United Kingdom has always punched above its weight, and even as our place in the world has changed and adapted, Her Majesty has ensured that we continue to do so. She has improved and protected Britain's reputation. Whatever culture, religion or tradition her people come from, she has treated them with respect and courtesy.

Her Majesty has shared our greatest moments and suffered with us in our darkest days. The young Princess Elizabeth joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service, driving and mending cars for the allied war effort. She presented Bobby Moore with the World cup in 1966 and starred alongside James Bond at the 2012 Olympics. Of course, she also addressed the nation at the start of covid lockdowns, reminding us that we would one day be back together again. At every moment of national joy or commiseration, she has been there—an unwavering presence through turbulent times; the very epitome of duty.

It is not simply her status or her role that earns Her Majesty the respect, the admiration and the love of people around the world; it is her commitment to others and her innate decency. We come together to celebrate Her Majesty this year, the year of the platinum jubilee, not just because of all that she has done, not just because of how long she has done it for, but because of the way she has done it and the way she has enhanced us all. We celebrate her not just for representing our great nation, but for making it greater still. We celebrate her not just for being our Queen, but for being a Queen for all her people.

2.19 pm

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): I stand here between two Crowns: symbols of the fact that the Queen is an important part of the lawmaking process.

We thank the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister for the way they have introduced the debate. The Leader of the Opposition referred to his knighthood. Last evening at Drapers' Hall, Richard Luce, now Lord Luce, former Lord Chamberlain to the Queen, spoke for her platinum jubilee in the presence of the Earl of Wessex. Drapers' Hall is where the Queen was admitted as a senior member of the Court. Some



[Sir Peter Bottomley]

years after, she attended the opening of Drapers' Academy in east London. Two pupils had school dinner with her and were asked what that was like. They said, "It was all right when we asked her what it was like during the war."

The Queen has become the person we all know her to have been. She has been through more things than all the rest of us have in our lifetimes. I was calculating that the senior Member of this House, the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) who was elected before me, and I have served on and off for two-thirds of her reign. When I was first elected, Sir Bernard Braine was the Member for the overseas territories and dependencies. There have been others who have fulfilled that role. We are not just speaking for this country; we are speaking for the dependencies as well. I am very glad that Mr Speaker is able to be in the Falkland Islands, and we send him our best wishes and thanks for doing that.

On the human side, when my wife and I were living in south London, the Queen's Equerry, Patrick Plunket, bought a house nearby. He sadly died early, and the Queen and Prince Philip very kindly came to a birthday party for Robin Plunket, the brother. I have never seen such a fast gathering of prams and children to provide a guard of honour for one of the Queen's informal visits. She just attracted people and spoke to them all with the kind of inclusiveness which we can occasionally see at the garden parties, when 8,000 of her closest friends come together several times a year.

It is also notable that the Queen has been on the throne 70 years. It is 69 years, I think, since the coronation. I was one of the people, aged eight, sleeping out in the Mall. I end with this: for those who may get involved in quiz questions about the Queen and even the coronation, the person with Queen Sālote of Tonga was Ibrahim IV, the Sultan of Kelantan in Malaysia, not the person in Noël Coward's joke. We wish her well.

2.22 pm

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to be here on behalf of my party in place of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for this Humble Address on the occasion of the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. It is an extraordinary thing to consider that Her Majesty has reigned for 70 years. That is an incredible number and an historic achievement. No other monarch has reigned for such an extraordinary period of time.

The social changes that have occurred during that 70-year period have been profound. The world is a very different place now from June 1953, when Her Majesty took the throne. It is difficult to compute how much has happened in a timeframe that has included 14 UK Prime Ministers, the first radio broadcast, which the Queen made in 1940, during the second world war, and the first time the Queen published an Instagram post, which was in 2019. In fact, that is the same for me—the Instagram post, rather than the radio broadcast, of course.

Generations of us have known Her Majesty the Queen as a constant, as she has gone about her duties. I remember—I am afraid that this was not yesterday, Madam Deputy Speaker—the occasion of the silver

jubilee, when I was a very small girl in primary one or two. I recall receiving a commemorative coin to mark the occasion and the coins being very carefully taken home by all the children in the class.

It is remarkable that Her Majesty, at the age of 96, continues to deal with affairs of state, undertake official engagements, and support charities and good causes. Clearly, she also continues to take an ongoing and active interest in the things that she is interested in. It is well known that she has a lifelong love of the outdoors and enjoys being out and about. Her enjoyment at spending time in beautiful locations in Scotland, such as her homes in Balmoral and Holyrood, has been well reported over many years. And of course, she has attended the opening of the Scottish Parliament and been there a number of times. It is also well known that she has a love of animals. I understand that she has owned more than 30 corgis. That obvious fondness for pets is much appreciated by other dog lovers.

Beyond interests and hobbies for all of us is family. Like all Members, I was very sorry when Her Majesty the Queen lost her lifelong companion, her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh. I cannot imagine how difficult it was to carry on, having lost someone who was at your side for so many years, and deal with that during the covid pandemic while continuing to undertake the duties required. It will have been very hard and those of us who have lost loved ones will appreciate that to some extent.

One perhaps unexpected piece of information for hon. Members is that since I was a very small child, I have always known the Queen's birthday—21 April. I know that because it was also my gran's birthday. My gran was a great admirer of Her Majesty and she must have told us about that coincidence a number of times for it to have stuck with me. Since being a young woman, she had followed the progress of the Queen. I think they had the same attitude to carrying on and helping others. I know the notion of public service was very important to my gran. For her part, she was very interested in seeing what the Queen was involved in, which charities she was supporting, where she was travelling to and so on. She also attended royal visits with some enthusiasm. I think she was interested in that because the late Queen Mother was an Angus girl. Having grown up in Angus myself, it is perhaps the case that people living in that area took a particular interest in what the Queen was doing.

The range of duties and the spectrum of groups, organisations and charities the Queen has supported over 70 years is undoubtedly extraordinary. In Scotland alone, she is patron of numerous charities, ranging from well-known names such as the YMCA to more local initiatives, including the Aberdeen Association of Social Service. She has supported many other charities over many years, including some based overseas. The royal family website makes that very clear, stating that the Queen sees public and voluntary service as one of the most important elements of her work.

I am sure I can speak for those involved in groups like those, as well as for my colleagues on the SNP Benches, when I say that this is indeed a notable occasion. I congratulate Her Majesty the Queen on the extraordinary occasion of her platinum jubilee and send all best wishes.

2.27 pm

**Mrs Theresa May** (Maidenhead) (Con): It is indeed a privilege to rise to pay tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on her platinum jubilee, on behalf of myself and my Maidenhead constituents.

Seventy years on the throne is a remarkable achievement. During each and every one of those years, what has shone through has been Her Majesty's utter dedication to duty, her selflessness and her great love of country. She has served with dignity and grace through not only what have been some very remarkable changing times, but through some difficult years for her family. As has already been referred to, she has seen Prime Ministers come and go. I was No. 13. [*Laughter.*] But I echo the comments of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when I say that she has greeted us all with charm and consideration, and with an impressive knowledge and understanding of the issues of the day. For all those 70 years, Her Majesty has been a rock for the nation, a point of stability around which the changing tides of history have swirled. Her commitment to service has been remarkable, and it should be an example and an inspiration to us all.

Most people see Her Majesty when she is on her official duties and do not see what goes on behind the scenes. I was pleased when, on the date of her platinum jubilee in February, the palace released photos of her with her private secretary going through her red box, which she does assiduously, but which is a part of her work of which few people are aware.

When the Queen is out and about on her official duties and people meet her, their joy and delight in seeing the Queen is obvious. That goes beyond our shores, as we have seen from her overseas visits, and I saw a little example of that when we hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting here in 2018. The Queen allowed us, very kindly, to meet at Windsor castle. There was a reception before the lunch and I was told that the Queen would turn up to it, but nobody else knew. The minute that she walked into the room, heads turned. There was a palpable sense of delight throughout the entire room and people started to queue up to make sure that they had the opportunity to speak to Her Majesty. We should particularly thank Her Majesty for all that she has done for the Commonwealth and for her great love of the Commonwealth. The strength and growth of that network of nations has been made all the more possible by the fact that she has been at its head.

Aside from official duties, I have also had the opportunity to see Her Majesty in more relaxed times; I speak particularly of the Prime Minister's weekends at Balmoral. Her Majesty's great desire for all her guests to be relaxed and enjoy themselves was absolutely clear. She takes great care to put people at ease and to ensure that they are enjoying the benefits of the beautiful Scottish countryside. During the time at Balmoral, I also saw Her Majesty's great love and understanding of the countryside. She was driving us to a place where we were going to have one of the famous evening barbecues. There was a gate in the track, and in front of the gate stood a very large stag. Her Majesty slammed on the brakes and said, "What is he doing here?" To most drivers, that would have meant, "Why is he in my way?", but not to Her Majesty. As she explained, she knew that the deer should be on a different part of the

hillside. She could not understand why he had come down so low. She knew the countryside; she knew its animals.

The Queen's love of gardens is clear, and her joy in being able to go to the Chelsea flower show this year could be seen by all. Her love of horses, which has also been referred to, was clear when she was able to attend the last evening of the Royal Windsor horse show. There was a particularly poignant moment when Lady Louise Windsor entered the arena driving the carriage of the late Duke of Edinburgh.

Her Majesty has been a constant presence in our lives. She is respected across the world. She has been steadfast in her selflessness, in her dedication to duty, in her commitment to her country. For 70 years, she has dedicated her life to service of her country and her people, and for that, from the bottom of our hearts, we say simply: Ma'am, thank you, and God save the Queen.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I commend the right hon. Lady on her platinum jubilee purple. If we had thought, it could have been made compulsory. Perhaps on another day.

2.33 pm

**Ed Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): It is a pleasure, on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, to join every party in the House today to send our best wishes and support this address to the Queen. Two weeks ago, following the Queen's Speech, we sent our well wishes for Her Majesty's health, so it has been wonderful to see the Queen out and about in the past two weeks at various celebrations and events—most recently opening her namesake, the Elizabeth line, and attending the Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea flower show.

In her coronation speech, Queen Elizabeth said:

"Throughout all my life and with all my heart I shall strive to be worthy of your trust."

I think the whole country will agree that our Queen has more than fulfilled her promises made to our nation. With her sense of selflessness and her steadfast commitment to the nation, these values and her service have defined Her Majesty's seven-decade reign and will continue to define her. The unwavering nature of her service and duty is made all the more remarkable by the length of Her Majesty's reign. Our Queen is the longest-reigning female monarch in history, not just of this country, but of anywhere in the world. Unlike any other monarch—in this country, at least—her reign has seen more peace and more prosperity than at any time in our nation's history. The Queen's gentle but strong presence throughout these years has been ever constant, and in challenging times, she is always a source of calm and comfort.

Her Majesty movingly described the Duke of Edinburgh, whose presence will be greatly missed at the jubilee celebrations, as her "strength and stay". Well, truly, Her Majesty is the strength and stay of our nation. Through it all, she has remained above the fray of politics. That is so valuable and important, because we in this democratic place will inevitably have disagreements on many, many things. There are, and should be, many shades of opinion, but because of Her Majesty, being proud of our country—being patriotic—is not about someone's political allegiance. It is not grounded in whether they agree with the Government of the day, so I am grateful that the Queen clearly values her loyal Opposition as much as her Government.

[Ed Davey]

It is because of the Queen that Members from across the House—political polar opposites—can come together today and reflect on the many things that we have in common. We can all celebrate and share that sense of pride in our nation in this platinum jubilee. In 1977, 2002 and 2012, we were fortunate enough to enjoy other jubilees, with street parties, commemorative mugs and, of course, the unforgettable sight of Brian May playing guitar on the roof of Buckingham Palace.

I was at school when we celebrated the silver jubilee and, to be honest, my strongest memory of 1977 is the Queen's smile and personal delight as Virginia Wade won Wimbledon. My fingers are crossed that Emma Raducanu might serve up something similar later this year.

For the golden jubilee in 2002, I was honoured to meet Her Majesty when she visited my constituency in the royal borough of Kingston. The Queen unveiled a stone commemorating the 1,100th anniversary of the coronation of King Edward the Elder—one of the great Anglo-Saxon kings—who was crowned in Kingston. In 2025, Kingston will celebrate the 1,100th anniversary of the crowning of King Athelstan, the first true, undisputed King of England. Nothing would bring me greater pleasure than to welcome our country's greatest monarch back to Kingston to mark that special occasion.

As others have said, the highlight of the diamond jubilee in 2012 was watching the film when the Queen parachuted down to the opening ceremony of the summer Olympics. I have been honoured to have several conversations with the Queen over the years. I will not disclose those, but I will disclose a conversation that I had with Queen Margrethe of Denmark during the summer Olympics, when I was able to visit her on the royal yacht—it was a rather small affair compared with the one that the Government currently want to buy. I asked Queen Margrethe when she was taking up parachuting. She drew on a cigarette—Queen Margrethe of Denmark is a committed smoker—and said, “When I'm over 80.” She has some very kind words to say about Queen Elizabeth II.

As for the platinum jubilee, I am sure that, like me, colleagues across the House have already engaged in celebrations in our constituencies. Last Monday, I channelled my inner Mary Berry to judge a jubilee bake-off at Ellingham Primary School in Chessington. I was thrilled to crown Charlotte as the star baker for her delicious Union Jack cake, topped with raspberries and blueberries, and to present prizes, too, to year group winners Nancy and Aiden for their jubilee tributes.

Among the mountains of children's sponge cakes and cupcakes, I was struck by two things: the huge temptation to cheat on my diet—I did not, Mr Deputy Speaker—and the palpable excitement and enthusiasm that young children had for the Queen and the jubilee. One of the joys of royal jubilees is seeing how they bring people together and the excitement of young people, especially in our communities and at their wonderful street parties—I am hoping to go to many in my constituency. I join Members in all parts of the House in wishing Her Majesty the very best on this momentous occasion.

2.40 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Apart from the Father of the House, most hon. Members at this debate have lived under no other monarch. I was only one year old when the Queen came to the throne, so I must confess that my recollection of the last reign is somewhat dim, but I have been very happy to live during this one.

I am not sure whether it has yet been mentioned that the Queen is the only leading public figure who never asked for the job. She never campaigned for it, never plotted for it and probably never wanted it. Her whole life has been one of duty—what an incredible record.

Another point that has not been emphasised is that Her Majesty is one of the very few remaining leading public figures who acknowledge their faith. Others, perhaps, fear putting themselves on some kind of moral pedestal. Her faith is moderate, compassionate and non-judgmental, as she reminds us every year on the Feast of the Incarnation, in her Christmas address, and at the end of the Queen's Speech. As we stand at the Bar of the other House, she tells us, “I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.” I doubt that they always do.

As Princess Elizabeth and as Queen Elizabeth, she has never been afraid of talking about her faith. Who can forget her 21st birthday speech in Cape Town? She addressed “all the peoples of the British Commonwealth...wherever they live, whatever race they come from, and whatever language they speak”,

vowing that

“my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service”.

She ended her address by invoking divine help:

“God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it.”

The reign of the first Queen Elizabeth was marked by religious bigotry, division and bloodshed—indeed, one of my ancestors was hung, drawn and quartered for his faith—but the reign of this Queen Elizabeth has been marked by unity, peace, freedom and toleration. Whether we are people of faith, atheists, humanists or secularists, we appreciate her long record of devoted service, which I am sure is founded on her faith, and we celebrate her whole life.

May I end with a personal point? I know that we are not supposed to talk about Privy Council meetings, but the Prime Minister has emboldened me by addressing, in part, what happens in his meetings with the sovereign. When I was made a Privy Counsellor, I mentioned to the present Clerk of the Privy Council that I was very proud that my father had been its clerk some 35 years earlier. The present clerk is a very modern civil servant, of course, so he looked completely blank, but when I summoned up the courage to mention it to Her Majesty, she immediately fixed me with an eagle eye and said, “Yes, I know it—I remember it.” That sums up not just her devotion to duty, but her formidable intellect. How lucky we are to have a Head of State who has such an incredibly long institutional memory.

2.44 pm

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): It is an honour and privilege to speak in this debate on our Humble Address to Her Majesty the Queen. We are here today to celebrate her service to our nation, and to reflect on her momentous 70 years as our sovereign.



Her Majesty is now the third longest-serving monarch in world history. When we look over her reign, we see a world transformed. When the Queen came to the throne, the idea of someone holding a device with the power of a computer in their palm was pure science fiction; putting a human on the moon was still a dream; and the cold war was just getting started. Closer to home, the NHS was still in its infancy, and was giving people back control over their health. The welfare system was only just starting to truly level up the country. Those achievements laid the foundations of the nation that Her Majesty was about to be crowned to rule over, as she does to this day.

Our armed forces, who so loyally defend and protect Her Majesty and our country, have faced many deployments during her reign. The Government should use this auspicious year as a chance to renew our covenant with them. Her Majesty has proudly led our armed service personnel, and it is only right that in this Parliament we reflect her pride in them.

Under Her Majesty's reign, the United Kingdom has witnessed fundamental changes in how society welcomes others and expresses our gratitude for their contribution. Her Majesty showed us the way to being a more compassionate society by advocating for the importance of the Commonwealth. She has been a driving force in bringing people together from across the world to celebrate our differences and share our joint aspirations for a more peaceful and prosperous world. Without a shadow of a doubt, the Commonwealth is one of Her Majesty's greatest achievements.

The Queen is passionate about her horse-racing, as many hon. Members have said. In a debate on a Humble Address that celebrates her life and achievements, it would be remiss of me not to mention something that brings her so much joy. She has had some truly fantastic horses, including one of the most famous, Estimate. Many a race-going fan will remember the poignant moment in 2012 when Estimate won the Queen's vase at Royal Ascot. It was presented to the Her Majesty by the late Duke of Edinburgh, whose service to our country we all so greatly value and miss. For Ministers on the Treasury Bench who like a flutter, I have spotted a few runners today that may be of interest. Oh So Audacious is running in the 2 pm at Yarmouth, followed by Enough Already in the 3.30. Then again, they may prefer Danger Alert in the 2.10 at Haydock.

If Her Majesty is looking for something to really put the cherry on the jubilee cake, I have just the thing: Maesteg town hall in my beloved Ogmore constituency is looking forward to its long-awaited grand reopening. I cannot think of anything better than welcoming Her Majesty for the grand unveiling. If anyone in the palace is listening, she is very welcome indeed.

Hon. Members' speeches have rightly focused on Her Majesty's dedication, and on her commitment to upholding our institutions and laws. The Queen's integrity and quiet perseverance in the face of difficulty should be an example to us all. When she was needed, she delivered. It is vital that every single person in this Chamber lives up to the oath that we make when entering this House, and that we carry out our duty with the same honour and integrity that she has displayed for more than 70 years.

The platinum jubilee has the power to bring communities together. I know that is so in Ogmore; I look forward to the events that are planned in the towns and villages

that make up my community. We have all faced an incredibly tough two years, but the jubilee celebrations will be a real tonic. Our high streets are being lined with bunting, while kitchens are starting to resemble explosions in a jelly factory as families try to recreate the platinum jubilee trifle. Most importantly, pressure is mounting on our forecasters for some decent weather over the bank holiday weekend.

Her Majesty represents the best of Britain. I thank her and wish her many, many more happy years as our sovereign.

2.48 pm

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): It is a great honour to join my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and other colleagues on both sides of the House in our tribute to Her Majesty the Queen on the presentation of a Humble Address.

I speak on behalf of my constituents in the ancient and loyal borough of Newark-on-Trent—ancient because we received our royal charter from Her Majesty's forebear Henry II, and loyal because in May 1646, Newark was the last town in the royalist cause to surrender in the civil war. It did so only on receipt of a personal command from the King, who gave himself up to the Scots outside the town. The town's defenders were impoverished, starving and riddled with disease, but all the contemporary accounts show that they were entirely unrepentant and committed in their loyalty to the sovereign. Then, the Crown relied on the loyalty of the people—and it does so even more in our modern democracy. Loyalty is a vague concept that can apply in many human situations. We can be loyal to our parents, our siblings, our friends, our employers and even—although this is less common—to party leaders. The loyalty that binds us to the Crown is peculiar, in that it is not based on any family tie or material consideration. In that sense, then and now, loyalty has had to be earned.

I am sure that the whole House will agree that Her Majesty the Queen, over her uniquely long reign, has earned the loyalty of her country. The nation holds her in its heart, not just as the figurehead of a great institution, but as an individual who has served our country with unerring grace, dignity and decency. She has been a golden thread running through the warp and the weft of our lives. My grandmother joined her in the crowds that lined The Mall on VE Day. My father watched the coronation on a rented television set in the crowded front room of the one house in the street whose occupant could afford one. It was the first time he had seen a TV set other than in a shop window. Today he says that what struck him most was how beautiful the Queen looked, even on a terrible-quality black-and-white TV. Afterwards, he lit a bonfire with his friends in the middle of their street. It would be several years before the council filled in the pothole, so some things never change.

Almost 70 years later, I had the privilege of meeting Her Majesty as a Minister, often virtually, as that was how Privy Council meetings were conducted during the pandemic. Samuel Pepys recorded that during the civil war, Newark's then representative communicated with the King by writing in cypher and concealing the script in a lead ball, which he asked the messenger to swallow and then pass out on arrival at the court. Fortunately for all concerned, Her Majesty has proved adept at using Zoom. Indeed, she always moves with the times.

[Robert Jenrick]

When I accompanied my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the Palace in 2019, after the short ceremony of giving us our seals of office had been completed and a few words had been exchanged, Her Majesty said—I hope this does not betray any confidence—“Well, I suppose we had all better get back to work.” That was that, and I think that is her. She is an example of efficiency, dedication, common sense, humility and good humour.

Few countries, if any, have been as fortunate as ours in having such an anchor, bracing us against the storms and providing a well of consistency and certainty. Few countries are fortunate enough to have someone who can represent the whole nation, and we need that now more than ever. Few countries have benefited from such a capable and knowledgeable ambassador on the international stage. Indeed, she is arguably the most admired and respected public figure in the world today.

Her Majesty the Queen has been guided by the pledge to serve that she gave on her 21st birthday in 1947. The words were simple, and we politicians know how easy it is to make promises and pledges; but the years have shown that they were uttered with deep conviction. The fulfilment of that promise has been the story of her life. My constituents in the loyal borough of Newark, and all of us in this House, would agree that Her Majesty the Queen has kept that pledge in full measure.

2.54 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Dirprwy Lefarydd. I thank you for the opportunity to congratulate Queen Elizabeth on celebrating the remarkable milestone of reaching 70 years since she acceded to the throne. That is indeed what you call a lifetime of service. I take this opportunity to put on record my gratitude to the Queen and to Buckingham Palace who, on Monday this week, planted the John Ystumllyn rose in the Buckingham Palace gardens. The rose was planted in memory of the life and legacy of John Ystumllyn, the first recorded black man—indeed, black person—in North Wales following his abduction as a child from western Africa in the 18th century. The rose was launched in his honour by Harkness Roses and by We Too Built Britain as part of its work of telling and uncovering the stories of under-represented people. The rose is therefore a powerful symbol of friendship and love, kindness and community, and those visiting the gardens at Buckingham Palace will now have an opportunity to reflect on his story and on what the rose represents for many years to come.

While we still have a long way to go, the rose is also a reminder of how far we have come as a society in the last 70 years. In 1952, for example, there were just 17 women in Parliament. In this Parliament, we have 225 MPs who are women, and I am proud to be the first woman to lead the Plaid Cymru group in Westminster. As the leader of my party, Adam Price, noted in the Senedd in his tributes earlier this week, the Queen's first official visit to Wales, on 28 March 1944, was also a momentous day for women's rights. This was the day on which MPs voted to pay women teachers the same as men. The same as men! Can you imagine that? And there was such opposition to it at the time. This was an important—indeed, critical—milestone in the wider struggle for equality. During the Queen's reign, women have

fought for and gained reproductive rights. We have also made progress on equal pay, with key legislation passed in the 1970s and '80s, and now there is a growing movement calling for fair recognition of the work that women do in caring for children and families. These are among the bright strands of social progress woven into the tapestry of the Queen's life and reign.

The Queen has been present for some of the most important events in recent history for Wales as a nation—our Wales. In 1999, the Queen was present for the inaugural opening of our Parliament. Last year—over two decades later—she returned to open our Parliament's sixth Session. In that time, our Parliament has become the Senedd, gained important legislative powers, and introduced legislation reflective of all the voices and aspirations of Welsh society. Now, the Senedd is set to consider proposals for historic reforms that will pave the way for a stronger Welsh democracy, with a greater ability to improve the lives of people across our country, energise our politics, and make our elected Parliament fairer, more representative, and thus more effective.

To close, and to echo the comments of my right hon. Friend Lord Wigley of Caernarfon, I am not instinctively a monarchist but, in her jubilee year, I stand in respect of the remarkable way Her Majesty the Queen has carried out her responsibilities over the years with consistency, dignity and grace. She has been a constant figure in all our lives. Llongyfarchiadau a phob dymuniad da i chi. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

2.58 pm

**Jane Hunt** (Loughborough) (Con): I am delighted to participate in the debate. What an historic moment it is—the first time we can celebrate a platinum jubilee in this place. I join colleagues in wholeheartedly thanking Her Majesty the Queen. I also thank her on behalf of all the residents of Loughborough, Shepshed, Barrow upon Soar, Quorn, Hathern, Sileby, Mountsorrel and the Wolds villages for her lifetime of public service and her unwavering dedication to the people of the UK and those across the Commonwealth. What an impressive feat to be both the longest serving monarch in the UK and the third—soon to be the second—longest serving monarch ever to have lived.

Loughborough has had the privilege of hosting Her Majesty on a number of occasions during her reign, including on 28 June 1996, when she came to open the new English and drama building at Loughborough Grammar School; it was named the Queen's Building in her honour. The school's deputy head, John Weitzel, shared this anecdote with me:

“The Queen arrived in pouring rain to be greeted by the 2,000 children of the Loughborough Schools' Foundation. After formally opening the new English and Drama Studio, as she entered the building for a tour she gave instructions that the children should return to their respective Schools, rather than continue to get wet waiting for her. I chose to ignore the instructions, and fortunately the rain ceased and after touring the building she walked through the Quad to the main Hall. To me this showed that she cared more about the children's welfare than I did.”

Her Majesty also visited Loughborough on 19 April 1966, when she signed and sealed the royal charter of incorporation that granted university status to Loughborough College of Technology. The Loughborough University of Technology was the first technological university in England and Wales. Since then, the university

has thrived, becoming the largest employer in Loughborough and having a global reputation for its cutting-edge theoretical and applied research. Professor Nick Jennings, the university's vice-chancellor, said:

"Loughborough University was granted its Royal Charter by Her Majesty in April 1966 and we are immensely proud of the success we have achieved through our teaching, research, enterprise and sport activities since that time. We have been honoured to receive seven Queen's Anniversary Prizes and it has also been a great privilege to host Her Majesty on campus several times, most notably in 2003 when she visited with the Duke of Edinburgh to open the ECB National Cricket Academy. Everyone at the University is excited and delighted that the Queen's baton relay will pass through the campus on 11 July as it makes its way to Birmingham for the Commonwealth Games. On behalf of all staff and students at Loughborough I would like to thank Her Majesty for her 70 years of service to the country. We send our best wishes for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations."

Of course, as well as academic achievements, Loughborough University is synonymous with sporting excellence, having trained many athletes who have gone on to represent the UK in international competitions, including at the Commonwealth, Olympic and Paralympic games. I am proud to say that Loughborough is the unofficial home of Commonwealth sport in England, and I share the vice-chancellor's delight that we will be hosting a leg of the Queen's baton relay.

The Commonwealth is, of course, the jewel in the crown. Throughout her reign, Her Majesty has overseen the Commonwealth's modernisation to ensure that it represents everyone and brings together communities from across the world. Indeed, shortly after her accession to the throne, Her Majesty stated:

"The Commonwealth bears no resemblance to the empires of the past. It is an entirely new conception built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty, and the desire for freedom and peace. To that new conception of an equal partnership of nations and races I shall give myself heart and soul every day of my life."

Her Majesty has been absolutely true to her word, as this strong commitment to bridging the gaps between communities for their own betterment has been a common thread throughout her reign.

In the same way, local residents in my constituency from all backgrounds will be coming together next weekend to celebrate Her Majesty's achievements. In Loughborough, on 30 and 31 May, the Bellfoundry Museum is holding a "ring for royalty" event. There is also a Great Central Railway celebration and the lighting of the beacon in Queen's Park on 2 June. Queen's Park also plays host to a big lunch on 5 June. In addition, there are a number of Thorpe Acre village events from 2 to 5 June, and the Wheeltapper pub will be holding a jubilee party from 3 to 5 June.

In Shepshed, the Word of Life church is holding a family fun day on 3 June, and there is a platinum jubilee concert on 4 June at Glenmore Park. In Mountsorrel, there is an afternoon tea dance at Memorial Hall on 3 June, and the Peter Le Marchant Trust is running jubilee boat trips throughout the week. In Quorn, there is a jubilee fair at Stafford orchard on 4 June. In Barrow upon Soar, there is a party in the park on 4 June. And there is a street party at the Stockwell in Wymeswold on 5 June. We are very keen on the Queen.

All these community events are testament to the huge impact Her Majesty's hard work and dedication have had on the people of Loughborough and, indeed, on

people in every corner of the world. I am sure I speak for all of Loughborough when I say, "God bless Her Majesty the Queen, and thank you."

3.4 pm

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am very conscious that, as you were one of my university students a long time ago, Mr Deputy Speaker, you are expecting a lot of history. However, having heard all the remarks so far on the great history, I am getting rid of that. Although I have had some dodgy ancestors, no one has ever been hung, drawn and quartered—yet.

May I be very personal in terms of my respect, admiration and love for the Queen and my pleasure at contributing to this address on her platinum jubilee? When I was doing my 11-plus exam at Kenyngton Manor School in Sunbury-on-Thames, I looked up from the paper and saw something strange: the caretaker was taking the flag down in a funny way—he was taking it down to half-mast. I have that early memory of the sad time when George VI passed away, and the Queen became Queen Elizabeth II. I remember that very well. Of course all of us have the memories from our childhood—the bonfires and the fun. Many of us in public life have had the luck of meeting the Queen several times and it was the sense of fun that I was most inspired by.

Early on, as a young Member of Parliament, I went to a civic occasion because the President of Brazil was visiting. I sat there and had a very nice time. The whole royal family were there, a couple of speeches were made and there was a melee when people went to get their coffee. Suddenly, I saw this small woman coming towards me and my wife, and she said, "Hello, I'm the Queen." I was taken aback. She said, "I understand you have four children" and we got into conversation, because she has four children and we have four children—it was a lovely conversation. She said, "Could you tell me one thing? The violinist in the small band, he was wearing an earring on his ear. Does that mean anything special?" My wife and I looked at each other with some puzzlement and could not give her an answer. There was this sense of fun. Every time I met her, there was something quite funny and mischievous, but lovely.

I was lucky enough to work closely with the Duke of Edinburgh, both on his wonderful work on design and on a Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce investigation into the future of the English countryside. That was a great joy because we met at the RSA and in Buckingham Palace. I was astonished at the close relationship between him and the Queen, and at his sense of fun. There was a Labour, a Conservative and Lib Dem Lord on that commission and he always had some bit of information to tease us with.

We had a wonderful annual reception for the Duke of Edinburgh's prize for design and there would be a lovely party. The Queen said to me, "You know that my husband has a secret method when greeting people. He shakes them by the hand and then sort of swings them away." So for the rest of the evening, I watched the Duke of Edinburgh and his wonderful way of shaking someone's hand and then throwing them on to the next business. So a sense of fun is something I remember.



[Mr Barry Sheerman]

I am the Member of Parliament for Huddersfield. They love the Queen in Huddersfield. We are a very diverse community, much more so than when she became Queen. Everybody in our community in Huddersfield loves and adores the Queen. She has come to my constituency, to the town, twice. Those Members who are not on the railway will not know this, but if the Queen comes to their constituency by train, the mayor greets her and the Member of Parliament is the next to greet her. The first time the Queen came to Huddersfield, my wife was abroad. I got in touch with the people who were organising the Queen's visit and said, "Would it be all right if I brought two of my children instead of my wife?" The message came back, "Yes, indeed!" So little John and little Verity came along with me to the station. The Queen immediately stopped, because it was quite unusual—all the rest were sort of boring middle-aged people—and she was delighted to meet these two children and have a conversation with them. It is those personal things that I remember. On her two visits to Huddersfield, the Queen was very well received and great fun.

I do not want to go into too much detail in respect of what we are doing to celebrate in Huddersfield but, like the hon. Member for Loughborough (Jane Hunt), we are going to have lots of events. I remember some of the events when I was little. I do not want to give my age away—although everybody knows it—but the first television I saw, in black and white, was the coronation service, although I have to say it was the next-door neighbour's television, not our own.

One of the Queen's special visits to Huddersfield was to open the amateur rugby league centre. What better time could there be to remember the opening of that centre? Of course, those who are not so well up on rugby league will perhaps not know that it was founded in 1895 in the George Hotel in Huddersfield. Working men in the north of England had to work six days a week and, if they played sport, they lost a day's wages. All the posh people in the south of England who played rugby said it would be disgraceful to give them the extra money that they lost from not working on that day. In the end, all the clubs met in the George in 1895 and said, "We will start a new game called rugby league, with 13 in the team rather than 15 and rather different rules." The only plug that I will make is that this weekend at Tottenham, for the first time in very many years, Huddersfield are playing for the Challenge cup. That made me think of the Queen's visit.

The last thing I want to say is that we have had really tumultuous times. We kind of forget them, don't we? But we have gone through some really tough times in our country. We have had good moments, but we have had really tough times. We have had tough times when people in this House have not been very nice to each other. There are times when we have, I think, let ourselves down. The whole country became very divided on political grounds, in the nasty sense of division. The Queen should be recognised for having the ability to bring all those divisions together and to be that act of unity. I have not been privy to the meetings with Prime Ministers or anyone else, but I know in my heart that over these years the Queen has had an influence in calming down elected politicians when they have fallen out. When we

have become too aggressive, too personal and too unpleasant to each other, she has been that calming influence behind the scenes, and she has sometimes taken a profile in that calming process.

I am proud to be here today, both personally and on the behalf of my constituents in Huddersfield.

3.14 pm

**Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is a great privilege and honour to congratulate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on her platinum jubilee on behalf of my constituents of North West Cambridgeshire.

On a tour of Africa, the then 21-year-old Princess Elizabeth took a vow, which has been referred to by earlier speakers. Taking that vow, she said:

"I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be dedicated to your service".

Her Majesty has truly kept that vow. With her matchless sense of duty, she has worked tirelessly and given the nation and the Commonwealth 70 years of dedicated service. Throughout that period, until very recently, she had the unwavering support by her side of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh.

During Her Majesty's reign, there have been 14 UK Prime Ministers, the first being Sir Winston Churchill. There have been 14 US Presidents, starting with Harry S. Truman, and Pope Pius XII was the first of seven popes. There have also been 10 Speakers, beginning with William Morrison, covering 19 Parliaments. In 1952, there were only eight Commonwealth countries, compared with the 54 that we now have.

It has been an extraordinary reign, during which our country and the world have witnessed enormous change. To put matters into perspective, I was born in Kakira in Uganda at a time when Uganda was still part of the British empire. My family arrived here in the '60s and now I, the son of an immigrant carpenter, proudly stand in this House paying tribute to Her Majesty on behalf of my constituents from North West Cambridgeshire.

Compared with 1952, there are now in the UK more opportunities for people to rise as far as their talent and ability will take them, and more opportunities for education, home ownership, better health, more leisure time and more prosperity generally. As has been mentioned by previous speakers, we are a much more diverse nation—diversity of race, diversity of faith and diversity of culture. Through it all, Her Majesty has provided continuity, a platinum thread through the decades, a voice for good whose advice has been sought by world leaders across the four corners of the world. Her Majesty has also played a crucial constitutional role. She has been the guarantor of the constitutional integrity of our nation, providing stability and constancy throughout the decades.

On a more local level, my constituency is relatively new, having been formed in 1997. It comprises the southern part of Peterborough and 100 or so villages, including many in the northern part of Huntingdonshire. Records show that, in 1978, Her Majesty visited the national Shire Horse Society centenary show at Alwalton. She opened the Peterborough Building Society's head office at Lynch Wood in 1988, and in 1991 there were traffic hold-ups as 3,000 extra visitors tried to see the Queen at the East of England Show.

Moreover, in June 2012, Her Majesty was the guest of Lady Victoria and Mr Simon Leatham, marking the Queen's diamond jubilee picnic at Burghley House, when some 7,000 people came along to enjoy music and aerial displays.

My constituency has changed in many ways in the past 70 years. A large part of it—the Peterborough part—was, until 1974, part of Northamptonshire. However, while much has changed during Her Majesty's reign, some things are timeless. I am sure that, were T.S. Eliot alive today, he would agree that the village of Little Gidding, of "Four Quartets" fame, is the same now as it was in 1945 when he published his poem.

Something else that is timeless is the love and affection that my constituents feel for Her Majesty. Sir John Colville spoke for many when he said in his book "The Elizabethans":

"In an age of melting convictions and questionable needs the Queen's unassuming virtues and faultless example have stood out like a rock in a sea of troubles."

My congratulations again, and I thank Her Majesty for a lifetime of service to our nation and the Commonwealth.

3.20 pm

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is an honour to be here today to pay tribute to her Majesty the Queen.

The Queen truly defines our modern history. Through the 70 years she has reigned, huge changes have occurred. In 1952, when Princess Elizabeth acceded to the throne, Winston Churchill was the Prime Minister, tea was still rationed and British troops were fighting the war in Korea. Some 14 Prime Ministers, 21,000 engagements and 70 years later, Queen Elizabeth II is now Britain's longest-reigning monarch, having seen us through every milestone in recent history. The constant amid such change, the Queen has been nothing but a loyal servant to her country, and across Barnsley we remain incredibly grateful for her work and service.

Indeed, Her Majesty has visited Barnsley, most notably in July 1977 as part of her trip to Yorkshire on her silver jubilee tour. In the coming days and weeks, our town will once again come together to mark the 70th year of the Queen's reign, her platinum jubilee. Bunting will decorate our town centre and on 2 June a commemorative beacon will be lit in the Glass Works Square, at the same time as over 2,000 others across the country.

Across the region, there will also be a number of events such as the service of celebration at Sheffield Cathedral. As part of the jubilee celebrations we congratulate our neighbours in Doncaster on gaining city status; I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton) is particularly pleased, after all her years of campaigning, to see Doncaster become a city. There will also be community events across Barnsley East, from Grimethorpe to Hoyland, such as the garden party at Owd Martha's Yard, where there will be a brass band and maypole dancing. Brass bands remain popular across south Yorkshire, and I pay tribute to the Grimethorpe Colliery Band, who performed "Brassed Off Live" at the Royal Albert Hall last night, 25 years after the iconic film was released.

It is great to hear that local schools will be holding celebrations too. Ellis Church of England primary school, Jump primary school and Forest Academy are all hosting

red, white and blue days with lots of activities, including special picnic lunches. High View primary school and West Meadows primary school are also hosting themed lunches, with the former creating an exhibition of work to commemorate each decade of the Queen's reign, and the latter hosting a sports day and poetry recital.

Jubilee celebrations provide a fantastic opportunity for people of all generations to come together and feel united as a community, as we honour the contribution Her Majesty the Queen has made over the past 70 years. We thank her for her service. God save the Queen.

3.22 pm

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): On behalf of my constituents, it is a great privilege and honour to pay tribute to Her Majesty on an extraordinary achievement. We offer our deepest gratitude, thanks and congratulations for her sense of duty and public service, which has been the hallmark of her extraordinarily long reign, a reign that, I believe, was also inspired at least in part by her love for and dedication to her father, King George VI.

Not many monarchs make their platinum jubilee—yet another achievement in a long and accomplished reign. The vast majority of us have known no other monarch, so we are true Elizabethans. In a changing world, she remains a fixed point. Across seven decades, we have all benefited from Her Majesty's quiet authority, dignity and firm understanding of the British people and our constitution. She has also been a great unifying force across the UK.

On the world stage, the Queen reigns supreme as a peerless ambassador not only for the United Kingdom, but for her example of selfless public service. She has been central in helping the country transition from empire to Commonwealth, to the benefit of all the countries and peoples involved. Her dedication and energy in serving her people are unparalleled in our history, and we all owe the Queen a huge debt of gratitude. She reminds us that leadership is about serving and, above all, leading by example.

At times, Her Majesty has steered our monarchy through challenging shoals, but there is little doubt that it now stands in good stead for the future. We recall the extraordinary photograph in which she featured along with the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cambridge and Prince George—our current Queen with the three future Kings. In a sometimes uncertain world, the monarchy is an important strength and stay.

In Her Majesty's address on her 21st birthday she dedicated her life to the service of the Commonwealth and her people, whether it be long or short. We have been fortunate that she has been granted a long life, and long may she reign over us. I know that my constituents will join me, as we all agree in this place, in saying God save the Queen.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I call Jim Shannon.

3.25 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): You threw me off there, Mr Deputy Speaker—I do not often get called so early in the debate. I am pleased to be called, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate.

[Jim Shannon]

It has been an honour to be an MP serving Her Majesty during her platinum jubilee year. It was my honour as a much younger man to serve her in uniform, and to do so for 14 and a half years. I do not take serving in this House for granted and feel incredibly privileged and humbled to be here today.

I have many titles: husband, dad, granda, James to my mother and Jim to everybody that has known me since I was 18 years old, hon. Friend, Unionist, loyalist and, more aptly today, royalist. I was raised in Northern Ireland at a time when most houses had either a photo of the Queen or a photo of the Pope; I was raised with a photograph of the Queen. That will not be a surprise to anybody, but that was the Northern Ireland that we lived in. I had great respect for her from my family's teaching, and that respect has only grown as I have watched Her Majesty over the years and been impacted by her unparalleled service, her matchless dignity, her peerless dedication and her unrivalled work ethic. That was an ethic that that generation, my parents' generation, clearly had.

To watch her composed face as she sat alone at Prince Philip's funeral, refusing to ask for special consideration and in solidarity with the notion that she had not been the only person grieved and that she would do what her subjects were being asked to do, even at the very advanced age of 95, reaffirmed all I knew of the character of my Queen. The memory of her alone in that chapel touched many of us and encouraged us through the most heartrending example of her display of duty and quiet dignity with which Queen Elizabeth II is synonymous.

The right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) is no longer here, but he mentioned her Christian faith and I want to refer to that too, as it is so important. I pray for many people in this House, but I pray for Her Majesty and the royal family every day. In recent years, I have been further inspired by the quiet faith that she holds so dear and that informs each aspect of her life. It has been wonderfully and reverently included in her annual Christmas speeches. As one newspaper said:

"As Britain has become more secular, the Queen's messages have followed the opposite trajectory...for the past 17 years, her messages have taken on a different tone, with the Queen explaining her own personal faith".

I want to quote what she said on one of those occasions, in 2014:

"For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role-model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people of whatever faith or none."

She also said:

"Billions of people now follow Christ's teaching and find in him the guiding light for their lives. I am one of them because Christ's example helps me see the value of doing small things with great love".

How much Her Majesty's words have encouraged me to live my faith in a respectful, personal yet open way, attempting at all times to speak the truth in love. I know that many of us who love this institution—this House, this wonderful tradition we have here—will also love the lady herself and will be concerned that the

Queen's mobility recently is a sign of greater concerns. I take great comfort, however, from the measured way in which her heirs, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge, are coming forward with a steady hand.

When we look at the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge with their modernised approach, soundly built on the historic foundation laid by Her Majesty, it is crystal clear that our monarchy will continue as an example of selfless duty and service. Back in 2012, I had occasion to bring my mother and father over to the garden party—it was the first and only time they were ever there. My mum was 81 and my dad was 83, so the people at the garden party were very kind and managed to find chairs. There were plenty of chairs about, but they went and got chairs for mum and dad to sit in as Prince Philip and the Queen came round. That was probably one of the best occasions of my parents' life. They were absolutely thrilled. My mum was really interested in all the vol-au-vents, wee small cakes and sweet stuff, while my dad was interested in the garden, so the two of them had an absolutely fantastic time and they talked about that garden party for many years after. I know they did not get to meet the Queen and Prince Philip directly, but when the Queen came around, I think she saw them sitting down and made it her business to acknowledge them, which of course made my mum and dad's day.

My constituency of Strangford is full of royalists—I was going to say loyalists, and they are loyalists too—and there will be dozens of platinum jubilee parties and events taking place the weekend after next. It will be of no surprise to the House to learn that my office is full of royalists as well. My parliamentary aide was beside herself when she was able to attend the Queen's garden party just two weeks ago, after 18 years of working with me. I take joy in seeing my two younger staff members in their 20s excited about what the Duchess of Cambridge is up to and talking of their respect for her grace and dignity in the face of adversity. It bodes well for the future, and we should be encouraged that Her Majesty is leading the royal family in a way that will continue in the future.

Not only do I admire Her Majesty for who she is, but I admire her steady hand on the legacy she is leaving with Prince Charles, Prince William and even little Prince George, who has a special place in all our hearts. In a world of celebrity motivated by the number of likes on a tweet, empty sermonising and self-service hailed as worthy of admiration, we can look at the pledge she made at her coronation and see the epitome of a promise fulfilled. The hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Shailesh Vara) referred to it, and I want to refer to it, too. I have often thought about those words, because they are good words for each of us. She said:

"I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service".

Her Majesty has done that and more in every one of those 70 years. She is a lady of refinement, grace, selfless dedication to duty and service, diligence, intelligence, humour, wit and faith. I could not be prouder to be British—I am always very pleased to say I am British—and proclaim her as my Queen. Long may she continue to reign over us. God save the Queen.



3.33 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): It is an honour to speak in support of this Humble Address to Her Majesty the Queen on behalf of my constituents in Meon Valley. I was delighted yesterday to discuss Her Majesty's long service with some children from Denmead Junior School in my constituency, who were here on a visit with the wonderful Parliament Education Centre. They were in the Monarch room. I met a group of school councillors, and we discussed how their work as representatives of their classes mirrors the work we do here in Parliament representing our constituents. I mentioned that I would be speaking today in this debate, and I asked them what messages they thought they might like to send to Her Majesty. The first response was that they would like to say thank you to her for being a "really nice monarch". Another response was that Her Majesty

"has been amazing and helped our country".

One remark, which I thought showed a precocious understanding of our constitution, said that Her Majesty "uses her powers wisely". Sir Walter Bagehot would approve.

With Her Majesty's expertise in our nation's affairs stretching from Sir Winston Churchill to the present day, covering 14 Prime Ministers, I am sure she has always given wise counsel to those who carry on the business of Government in her name. I was also asked to pass on the children's thanks for all Her Majesty's patience and hard work. Everyone recognises how hard she has worked throughout her life, but I was struck by the word "patience". She has remained patient and dignified, despite some vicious commentary at times in the media about her and her family, with which I think all hon. Members can empathise. I was pleased that the children recognised that there are bound to be times when being our sovereign is not easy or without complications, yet she has remained dignified and resolute.

Lastly, the council thanked Her Majesty for helping lots of different countries. She began her life as the daughter of a King Emperor and, during her reign, has seen the lives of millions of people transformed by the creation of democratic self-governing societies. Most of them have retained their links to us and to each other through the Commonwealth, and in many cases those links have been strengthened through migration. As head of the Commonwealth, she has been the most respected figure in world affairs throughout her reign, and I know that the jubilee will be marked around the world as an expression of love for our sovereign.

My life began in Aden, which was a British protectorate, and I spent most of my childhood in Commonwealth countries in the middle east while my father served Her Majesty for 46 years. In every country, she is recognised as a symbol of stability and continuity. Many millions of people have served in her name, as my father did, and she is a veteran herself, as she served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service during world war two. In the armed forces, she and other women of her generation were trailblazers in roles that were previously not open to them. Over the years, her successors have been able to break into more and more careers that were previously reserved for men. In the armed forces in particular, I am pleased that we are finally doing away with the last anachronisms of ranks that reflect an assumption that they are held by men.

I end by reflecting again on how pleased I was by the response of the children I met at Denmead Junior School yesterday. It gives me confidence that Her Majesty is an example of the values that we should all aspire to and hope that our children adopt, and that continue to resonate with people whose lives will stretch well beyond ours. Long may she reign.

3.36 pm

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate to mark the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen on behalf of constituents across Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. As has been said, most people in this country simply do not remember a time when the Queen was not there as the ever-present and reassuring presence that she has been through dramatically changing times over 70 years—a truly remarkable achievement.

I will briefly reflect on the links between the Queen and my constituency. She has made a number of visits to Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, but none more poignant than the multiple visits that she has made to the village of Aberfan. Her first visit was just days after the tragedy in October 1966 and the most recent was to open the new Ynysowen Community Primary School as part of her diamond jubilee tour in April 2012. I know that many people in Aberfan and across the constituency appreciate the special bond that they have with the Queen and the royal family.

I sincerely believe that the Queen and the royal family are a huge asset to our country. The Queen is there to represent the whole nation, be a conduit for national events and provide reassurance in difficult times. She is a uniting factor for all the nations and regions across the whole UK—an unwavering constant in a changing world. The right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) spoke earlier about the links with Wales. It is important to recognise that the Queen has been present to officially open every Session of the Assembly and now Senedd from 1999 to October last year.

From a young age, I have been passionate about community, and particularly community spirit. One of my earliest recollections is as a six-year-old taking part in the silver jubilee street party with friends and neighbours in the street where I still live, albeit in a different house. We will be having a street party there a week on Sunday in the same way that we did for the golden and diamond jubilees.

Community spirit is still very much alive in many of our communities, although it may not be as strong as it once was. Most people live busy lives, and certainly very different ones from those of our parents and grandparents in 1952, but if people are given a reason to come together from time to time, that community spirit very much comes to the fore. There is no better focus for bringing communities together in a positive way than a jubilee or royal event.

Our communities have been through a very difficult two years, and what the whole country went through together as a collective was extremely painful. However, as painful as it was, the positive, if there was a positive, was that it seemed to rekindle a community spirit in many areas. People were once again on hand to help their friends and particularly their vulnerable neighbours.

[Gerald Jones]

I have spoken to a number of people who set up WhatsApp groups and chat groups with their neighbours to get through the pandemic, and many have kept that communication going.

I am aware of a number of events being held across my constituency to celebrate the jubilee. Indeed, this week Twitter and Facebook have been full of activities going on in local schools. Tomorrow, I will be attending a number of jubilee celebrations in local schools. Next week, there will be church services, afternoon teas, displays of photos from across the Queen's reign, carnivals, fun days, a night of nostalgia and '50s music, a beacon lighting in Penderyn Square in Merthyr Tydfil and other areas across the constituency—and, of course, street parties, some organised and some on a more informal basis. All of those events will have two things in common: to mark the Queen's service to our communities and our country over 70 years, but also to bring people together in a national celebration, which is a fitting tribute to acknowledge Her Majesty's service to our communities, our country and, indeed, the Commonwealth.

It is worth highlighting that the jubilee will also support the local and, indeed, the national economy. I have spoken to organisers of community events over the jubilee weekend who have commented on the difficulties they have had in securing things for their events. One told me they had difficulty in hiring a face painter for the children, stating that the people they had contacted had told them they had been booked for weeks, but in the last month were getting three or four calls a day for bookings over the jubilee weekend. Other organisers have said they are struggling to get cabaret artists for the jubilee weekend, being told by agents that their acts have been booked up months in advance. Some organisers have even struggled to hire Portaloos for outside events, and I hope they are successful in getting those. In all seriousness, that represents the scale of activity going on across the jubilee weekend. It will certainly be busy in many communities with a range of events, but it will inevitably lead to a boost for the local and the national economy.

In conclusion, I return to the role of the Queen herself. As we know, for over 70 years she has been a constant. She has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to the service of the nation and the Commonwealth. She is the longest serving Head of State in the world, the longest reigning monarch in British history and the longest reigning female monarch in history. As Mr Speaker said in his opening address, which was read by the Chairman of Ways and Means, she is the third longest reigning monarch in world history. However, just as an update, in 20 days' time she will become the second longest reigning monarch in world history, and in only two years' time she will overtake Louis XIV to become the longest reigning monarch ever. That is some achievement.

As we have heard, on her 21st birthday, Princess Elizabeth said that

"my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service".

That statement was sincere, as has been evidenced by her exemplary service over 70 years. I know that the whole House will agree that the jubilee is a time for great celebration. I hope that it will also be an opportunity

to thank the Queen for her service and that it will reinforce to Her Majesty just how much love and respect people across the UK and the Commonwealth have for her in this jubilee year.

3.43 pm

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) and all the gracious speeches from right across the House, and what an honour and a privilege it is for me personally to speak on behalf of my constituents in South Dorset, a very loyal county, to mark the Queen's remarkable 70-year reign.

In fact, the monarch's longevity is such that "platinum jubilee" is not defined in the "Compact Oxford English Dictionary", whereas "golden jubilee" is. The publication refers to the latter as the 50th anniversary of "a significant event", which it certainly was. Can I make a suggestion for the former? Perhaps it could be defined as the 70th anniversary of "our great national treasure who epitomises grace, dignity and duty".

I would like to remind the House of the quote that several Members have used—they may have been looking at my speech and cheating—but it is a very appropriate quote that Princess Elizabeth made to the Commonwealth on her 21st birthday. I want to repeat it because it is so powerful and simple:

"I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service".

Our Queen has kept her word, and we are all the richer for it.

I have had the honour and pleasure to serve the Queen for nine years in the armed forces and to meet her in person twice. It is appropriate therefore to mention next Thursday's trooping the colour. I recall with great clarity and pride being on parade for three of them many years ago. There is a moment during the march past in slow time when you salute Her Majesty with your sword; the movement is graceful and flowing, and with your head firmly to the right, you look directly at the Queen. It is quite a moment. Her expression is impassive, but you know—we all knew—that every movement is being scrutinised and any slip-up noted. Her attention to detail is legendary and, for those who get it wrong, really quite scary.

The loyalty the Queen commands from the military is one of the many reasons our armed forces are the best in the world. Many friends who fought in the Falklands war told me that their best friend was the soldier beside them, but that loyalty to Queen and country drove them to commit acts of bravery that no one under normal circumstances would consider; it is called service and sacrifice, which in my humble opinion epitomises the Queen.

As I have said, I have met the Queen twice. On the first occasion, our battalion, based not far from here at Wellington barracks, was graced by not one Queen, but two: the Queen and Queen Mother. They were attending the presentation of new colours, and the photograph of that hangs proudly on my wall. The second occasion was when Her Majesty opened the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy prior to the sailing games in my constituency. The many attendees were formed into groups of about eight, and we watched and waited as the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh worked

the room, stopping to talk to every single one of us. I wondered then just how many times the couple had done this, and I marvelled at their nobility, patience—we have heard that word many times today—and endurance. The room was abuzz, and the reception the royal couple received was close to adoration. However, this was not some infatuation: it was a mixture of respect and affection generated by years of flawless service.

Finally, like, I am sure, many in the House, I watched “The Crown”. I paid little or no attention to the tittle-tattle in the script, but I was blown away by the historical sweep of the Queen’s life and the role she has played in our island’s history for 96 years. I was so moved that I wrote to her simply to say thank you for a life of sacrifice and duty, and a glorious reign that history will record for future generations to come. God bless the Queen.

3.48 pm

**Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), because it is about 12 years since, in June 2010, I followed his maiden speech in the Chamber with mine. It is also both an honour and a pleasure to take part in this Humble Address debate in honour of our Queen’s 70th jubilee.

My late parents were, like many of their generation, contemporaries of Her Majesty and other members of the royal family, and always had great admiration for them. Just like my parents, I am a proud royalist, and have enjoyed celebrating many royal events since my childhood.

My parents, with several members of the family, were fortunate in getting tickets for seats on The Mall for the coronation in 1953. We still have those tickets; my dear aunt kept them as a memento. I always loved listening to my mother recalling her memories of the day: watching the procession in the rain and—something that always struck me—watching the Queen appearing, a tiny figure waving from the gold state coach.

I have a television story to add to those of the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) and my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman). I knew there was a television in my late husband’s street; indeed, it was his family who had the tiny television. My husband was about six at the time. He said that the house was full of neighbours, and that people were trying to peer through the window to watch the coronation on the tiny set. That shows just how interested people were in such a big event.

The people of North Tyneside have always given the Queen, her late beloved husband the Duke of Edinburgh and all the royal family a great welcome whenever they visit our region. The north-east has great affection and deep respect for Her Majesty, and thousands will join in the jubilee celebrations.

I very much look forward to attending several events in my constituency, starting this weekend when I will join the Wideopen and North Gosforth Community Association at Daverson hall for their early weekend-long jubilee event, although I will not be able to be there all weekend. On 2 June, I will celebrate with the residents association of Yeoman Street in North Shields—the street next to where I was brought up—at their jubilee street party. I will round off the celebrations on 5 June

at the Longbenton estate jubilee party in the local community garden. As others have said, fingers crossed for good weather.

On behalf of everyone in the North Tyneside constituency, I thank the Queen for her years of dedication and service to our country and Commonwealth, and congratulate her on her historic platinum jubilee. May God grant her good health for years to come.

3.51 pm

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to rise to support this Humble Address to Her Majesty the Queen. In doing so, I am mindful that while all my constituents are important, the Queen, through her Sandringham estate, is undoubtedly the most special. Sandringham in my North West Norfolk constituency has long been held in affection by the royal family, with George V describing it as,

“Dear old Sandringham, the place I love better than anywhere else in the world.”

Having ascended the throne at the age of 21, the Queen has lived her life in the public eye. It is Sandringham that offers her a retreat, and a place for family gatherings, where she can enjoy privacy, relaxation and, of course, her country pursuits. It was at Sandringham where the Duke of Edinburgh, who played an immensely important role in supporting Her Majesty, chose to spend his time when he retired from public life to enjoy the sanctuary it offers. The continuity that Sandringham has provided through four generations means that her Norfolk home occupies a unique place in the Queen’s affections.

Her Majesty’s love of horses has been well remarked in this debate. A racehorse stud was first established at Sandringham by Edward VII. The Queen’s expertise is demonstrated by her success on the turf. Just last weekend, one of her horses, King’s Lynn, was a winner at Haydock Park, and it is expected to run at Royal Ascot next month. If I can offer the House a tip, the bookies are offering odds of 14:1, which is pretty good.

Although Sandringham is foremost a family home, and perhaps known most famously through the Christmas day walk taken by the Queen and the royal family to the church in Sandringham, Her Majesty is much loved by the communities of the close-knit villages around it. She is a very special part of those communities, and they let the royal family and the Queen go about their business largely without fuss. Indeed, it is reported that on one occasion, a local shop assistant said, “You look just like the Queen,” to which the Queen is said to have replied, “How reassuring.”

Her Majesty is a stalwart of that other constant in our nation, the women’s institute, having been a member of the Sandringham branch since 1943. A few years ago, when the branch marked its centenary, it took part in a version of the TV quiz “Pointless”, with the Queen, naturally, leading her team to victory. On that occasion, she said:

“Of course, every generation faces fresh challenges and opportunities. As we look for new answers in the modern age, I for one prefer the tried and tested recipes, like speaking well of each other and respecting different points of view; coming together to seek out the common ground; and never losing sight of the bigger picture.”

Those words capture the essence of Her Majesty the Queen’s dignified approach to leading our nation over the last 70 years.



[James Wild]

Across North West Norfolk, the Queen is greatly loved. To celebrate this extraordinary year, we will be holding events. Beacons will be lit; street parties will be held; there will be a musical royal salute involving over 1,000 schoolchildren and adults; new trails will open up areas of the countryside that are special to Her Majesty; and there will be many more events besides. All of them are a very fitting way for my North West Norfolk constituents to honour her continuing remarkable service to our country.

3.55 pm

**Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab): It is an honour and privilege to speak in this Humble Address to Her Majesty.

I echo the words we have heard from right hon. and hon. Members across the House, and wish Her Majesty the very best on the occasion of her platinum jubilee. The warmth and affection towards Her Majesty from Members on all sides, in a place where we often disagree, show how important a figurehead she has been for her country over the last 70 years. There has been incredible change in that time, but one of the few constants throughout has been Her Majesty's steadfast service, despite the many challenges that she and our country have faced. It is not too fanciful to say that she has become the metaphorical mother of the nation. Her commitment to our country has been truly unwavering, and we all owe her a debt of immense gratitude.

My constituency of Enfield North has a number of celebrations taking place to mark Her Majesty's platinum jubilee. My diary includes street parties across the Borough of Enfield, a civic reception at the town hall, and parties at Totteridge Road Church and the Nursery on the Green. I am sure all of them will be fantastic events that bring our community together on this very special occasion. I am particularly looking forward to my visit to Bush Hill Park Primary School tomorrow afternoon to join pupils and teachers in their jubilee celebrations. The pupils have been learning about the incredible changes we have seen over Her Majesty's reign, and will be commemorating the occasion through parades, poetry and song. I am sure the pupils have put a lot of work into their preparation, and that they will make themselves, their teachers and parents, and Her Majesty proud. Events like these show the warmth and respect the people of this country have for Her Majesty. Like all Members, I hope the strong community spirit we are seeing ahead of the celebrations may long continue.

Finally, on behalf of myself and my constituents of Enfield North, I send our very best wishes to Her Majesty as she celebrates her platinum jubilee. Long may she reign over us.

3.57 pm

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is a great honour to speak in this tribute debate to Her Majesty the Queen on the occasion of her platinum jubilee. The celebration of Her Majesty's jubilee will involve many parties and much joy, but it will also be a thank you to Her Majesty. Seventy years ago, she said: "my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service".

Indeed it has been; she has served our country with grace, dignity and love.

During her reign, the Queen has met many, many people. A YouGov poll back in 2018 found that around a third of the population had seen or met the Queen in real life. For each one, it is a special and much-treasured moment and memory. The same, of course, is true for me. I was 17 years old, a student at Gordonstoun in Scotland, when Her Majesty came to visit my school. I vividly remember the excitement, and the preparations, which included mowing the lawn, cleaning the gutters and re-painting the white lines on the speed bumps, so that everything was perfect for her arrival. I remember the excitement that I, a mere scholarship student, felt at being chosen to sit opposite Her Majesty at lunch. I remember my worry, too. What if they gave us spaghetti bolognese? How would I manage? I need not have worried. The Queen was truly charming and, as many have observed today, she is wonderful at making people feel relaxed and at ease in any circumstances.

My particular memories from that dinner include, first, discussing travel. It was fascinating to hear of the Queen's many visits to and love for her Commonwealth. It was also interesting to reflect on how her visits to a country differ from those of her subjects. I realised that there are many places that she can go and see that I cannot, but there are also many places that I can go and see that she cannot.

My second memory of the lunch was that, as it came to an end, there was to be a music recital. The Queen moved round to get a better view, coming to sit right next to me. I remember how surreal it felt—it feels surreal to describe it now, actually—to be an ordinary girl from Middlesbrough sitting next to this completely magnificent woman. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) spoke of how the Queen has a great sense of fun. I remember sitting there lost for words—some may not believe that, but I was—feeling in awe and unsure what to say, when Her Majesty asked, "Would anyone like any more of those fudge squares?" We, on our best behaviour, of course said, "No, thank you," and she picked the tea plate up, opened her bag and, with a twinkle in her eye, tipped the fudge inside, declaring them as good for the train later. We were not sure whether they were for the corgis, for her or for the grandchildren. Nevertheless, it added some of her gentle humour to proceedings.

Throughout the House, there will be many, many memories to share, as there are across my constituency. Some of my constituents will remember visits that she has undertaken locally, particularly to RAF Cranwell, which is also well known to her son, the Prince of Wales, as he began his armed services career there in March '71. I have been delighted that a wealth of aircraft have taken to the skies over RAF Cranwell this week to rehearse for the fly-past that is due to take place next week for Her Majesty's jubilee, with more than 70 aircraft, including the Red Arrows, Spitfires and Hurricanes, set to go on display.

The nation is coming together not just in London, but in every village across our country. Preparations are under way across Sleaford and North Hykeham to celebrate Her Majesty's 70 years of service. The village of Osbournby—as was the case back at school all those years ago—is ensuring that the place is spick and span before the jubilee celebrations, with a village tidy-up on 29 May to make sure that everything is just lovely. Many villages such as Sudbrook are having street parties

and cake competitions. Others have interesting and unusual ways of celebrating the jubilee, such as North Kyme, where there will be a jubilee-themed scarecrow competition. North Kyme will also light one of the 2022 charity beacons that will be lit across the UK for the jubilee weekend.

Metheringham has a competition for the best poem about the Queen and the best decorated crown, and I am sure that Her Majesty would approve of the dog and pet show. North Scarle is producing a quilt, with members of the community each stitching a nine-inch square. I noted that the instructions said, “Our Queen is thrifty. We expect you to upcycle or recycle the materials, not simply buy them”. Each child of primary school age in Potterhanworth will be provided with a truly beautiful medal in a little gift box to celebrate and remember this momentous occasion. Brant Broughton is doing similar with commemorative mugs for all children under the age of 18.

However my constituents remember the jubilee in the next week, the common thread running through all the celebrations will be gratitude to Her Majesty for all that she has done and will do in future, admiration for how she does it and a genuine love for our Queen. I would like to offer thanks to Her Majesty on behalf of all my constituents: thank you, Your Majesty. Congratulations on your platinum jubilee. God save the Queen.

4.3 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): It is a pleasure to speak to this Humble Address on behalf of my constituents. Nobody can deny Her Majesty’s dedication to public service to her country. Seventy years is a lifetime and certainly much longer than most when it comes to their working life. Her Majesty has been on the throne for longer than many of us have been alive. She is an international symbol who instantly springs to mind. When we think of the United Kingdom, the Queen and the royal estate are a huge draw for tourists from around the globe. Even now, at the very grand age of 96, she remains dedicated to her role and to the people.

Her Majesty is, notably, more travelled than any monarch to precede her. In the Commonwealth alone, she has made in excess of 250 visits during her lifetime, from Canada to France to, of course—who could forget?—Rutherglen.

Rutherglen was granted royal burgh status in 1126 by David I of Scotland. Glasgow was not yet the powerhouse that it is in modern times, so Rutherglen, comparatively, was much greater in size. On 25 June 1953, only a couple of weeks after her coronation, the Queen and the late Duke of Edinburgh visited. It had been quite the day: they were coming to Rutherglen following engagements in Glasgow.

Residents of Rutherglen turned out in force to greet the new young monarch. It was a beautifully sunny day, and thousands lined Main Street waiting for a glimpse of Her Majesty. Children were particularly excited to see her: they were taken from their schools to see the visit, and they screamed in delight when her car passed. She remarked to the Provost that she had never seen so many children turn up at a visit. The Provost said that the children had given them

“the kind of reception only children can give.”

Those children will be well into old age now, in their 70s and 80s. Her Majesty took tea in the town hall before signing the visitors’ book, and off she went to Rutherglen station, the royal train and the next destination.

Even more popular with Her Majesty is Blantyre, which is also in my constituency and which she has visited several times. As a small child in 1929, when she was still Princess Elizabeth, she accompanied her mother when she opened the David Livingstone birthplace museum. The museum, which I brought to the attention of the Leader of the House just two weeks ago, is still going strong. It has recently been completely refurbished, and I am sure that Her Majesty would love to visit it again and see what has changed. In 1942, she came again as part of a series of visits designed to boost wartime morale and, in 1962, after she had been crowned, she visited the train station again as she made her way back from a visit to East Kilbride.

This year, celebrations in the constituency will be more modest. Rutherglen West and Wardlawhill parish church will host a street party, following the success of the party that it threw for the diamond jubilee, which made it to BBC News. Rutherglen Community Council has decided to establish a sub-group to launch a more permanent legacy to Her Majesty’s 70-year reign. The community council is pulling together a five-year plan, in which it hopes the local community will be actively involved.

I understand that a few smaller private celebrations will be held around Rutherglen, in the form of lunches and teas hosted by members of the community. I am looking forward to attending a beacon lighting hosted by North Lanarkshire Council and supported by South Lanarkshire Council. The invitation came from Susan, Lady Haughey, the Lord Lieutenant of Lanarkshire. Lady Haughey and other lords lieutenant across the UK are the Queen’s personal representatives in each lieutenancy area; these days it is more of an honorary title presented to persons of note in each area, but historically each lord lieutenant had military responsibilities.

In summary, my constituency has long had royal connections. I admire Her Majesty’s 70-year contribution to public life. That sense of duty and that enduring commitment are worthy of our celebration.

4.7 pm

**Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con): “Short of words” is not a condition that many people associate with me, but I do not mind telling the House that on this occasion I have struggled to put into words how much I and so many people across Rushcliffe admire Her Majesty the Queen and how much the whole country owes her, although colleagues will see that I have got through that.

History is populated by many great figures—great leaders such as George Washington, Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher, great scientists such as Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin and Marie Curie, great authors such as Jane Austen and William Shakespeare—but the measure most often used to define historical eras is the reigns of great individual monarchs or families such as the Tudors and the Stuarts. The reigns of the greatest monarchs name entire eras, such as the Victorian era. What will future historians make of our era? What will they call us? I have a prediction. I believe that we will be

[Ruth Edwards]

a first: for the first time in history, an era will supplant an earlier one and take its name. I refer, of course, to the Elizabethans.

The era that we now call Elizabethan stretched from 1558 to 1603 with the reign of Elizabeth I. She represents a great era, with everything from our discovery of the Americas and the defeat of the Spanish Armada to the invention of the first flush toilet, but I believe that it is fated to be subsumed into the broader Tudor era. Five hundred years from now, when people talk about the Elizabethan era, they will talk about the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; for her reign is longer, more significant and more transformative. Throughout it—as Mr Speaker himself has said—our country and our world have changed almost beyond recognition.

In eras past, the monarch was a remote, distant and unseen figure. Now, for the first time in history, our Queen has had a direct impact on a huge number of us. As the Leader of the Opposition said, hers is one of the most famous faces in the world—although perhaps not to everyone, everywhere. I recall the famous story of the time Her Majesty drove herself to the Royal Windsor horse show. Greeted by a guard who did not recognise her, she was told, “Sorry love, you can’t come in without a sticker.” The Queen, unfazed, replied, “I think that if you check, I will be allowed in.”

The Queen has transformed the relationship between the royal family and us, her subjects. For decades, she has been a steadying force at the heart of our country, but also a role model to so many. She epitomises duty, public service, and a tireless commitment to this country and to the Commonwealth. For the last 70 years, Her Majesty the Queen has worked on our behalf. Now, at the moment of her platinum jubilee, we come together to congratulate her, to celebrate her and to thank her for everything she has done for us.

It is my privilege to speak today as the Member of Parliament for Rushcliffe, to thank and congratulate Her Majesty and to wish her well on behalf of our community. In Rushcliffe, we have a proud tradition of supporting Her Majesty and welcoming her when she visits. For example, at the time of the silver jubilee in 1977, Her Majesty came to the Trent Bridge cricket ground. She met the England and Australia teams during the Ashes test. We went on to win that Ashes

series; here’s hoping that her talismanic properties see us reclaim the Ashes next year. I often visit schools and community groups in my constituency, and I am struck by the awe and respect shown by everyone to our Queen.

Her Majesty has seen political upheaval, personal tragedy, historic moments and great milestones, and she has always done so with a stoic and steely determination. Her personal sacrifice, sense of duty and commitment to public service have inspired many people to serve their local communities. Next week is also volunteers week, a time to celebrate and thank all the volunteers in our communities. In Rushcliffe, that includes the Trent District Community First Responders, Cotgrave Community Kitchen, Sewa Day, Renew 37, our parish councillors, the Friary, Ruddington Village Museum, the Framework Knitters Museum, Tara’s Angels and all those who lead the scouting and guide movements, among many others. It strikes me that the real tribute to Her Majesty is not just the celebrations we will have over the weekend, but the tireless work of the many volunteers at the heart of our communities that epitomises the service and duty she has shown.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Ordnance Survey maps place one of my villages, Dunsop Bridge, at the very centre of the United Kingdom. It is even marked by a special telephone box. On behalf of the people of Ribble Valley, at the very centre of Her Majesty’s kingdom, let me say, “Your Majesty, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.”

I, like many of you—I listened to those wonderful speeches—will be celebrating over the next four days, attending many events, including the inevitable street party. I really look forward to that, because we will be royally celebrating this historic time in our nation’s history. How exciting is it for all of us to be alive at this time, as history is made? God save the Queen.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty to offer the heartfelt good wishes and loyal devotion of the House on the occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of Her Accession to the Throne, expressing its deep gratitude for Her Majesty’s lifelong unstinting service, leadership and commitment to the United Kingdom, Dependencies and Territories, Her other Realms, and the Commonwealth.



## Deposit Return Scheme

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Miss Dines.*)

4.13 pm

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Thank you very much indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker. What a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair. I should also like to thank Mr Speaker for granting me permission for this debate, and to welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), to her place on the Front Bench.

The issue before us today is Her Majesty's Government's proposed deposit return scheme for drinks containers, whereby consumers will pay a small levy upon purchasing a drink, which is then refunded once the container is returned to a collection point. Specifically, I wish to raise my serious concern that glass bottles are to be excluded from the scheme. The omission of glass represents a real and serious threat to the effectiveness with which a deposit return scheme in England and Northern Ireland can realistically be delivered. Quite simply, its exclusion would be a catastrophe for our natural spaces as we all look to stem the tide of drink container pollution. It also represents the direct betrayal of a promise made by the Conservative party to voters at the last general election, when we said in the manifesto that we would introduce a deposit return scheme for both plastic and glass drinks containers. I wish to use this debate today to urge Her Majesty's Government to rectify this as a matter of urgency and to immediately revisit the scheme's design so as to include drinks containers made from glass.

In 2019, the Conservative party laid out its ambitions for the future of our country in its election-winning manifesto, which attracted 60% support in the Kettering constituency. Central to our aspirations was positioning Britain as a world leader in rising to the environmental challenges that are facing our planet today. One of the challenges identified was how we manage and process waste, and in particular, combating the growing problem of discarded waste, of which drinks containers are a large part. In that manifesto, the Conservative party outlined plans for a world-class deposit return scheme for drinks containers in a bid to minimise their impact on the environment. The manifesto said:

"We will crack down on the waste and carelessness that destroys our natural environment and kills marine life. We will introduce a deposit return scheme to incentivise people to recycle plastic and glass."

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Hollobone:** I would be honoured and delighted.

**Jim Shannon:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward this debate. In my council area of Ards and North Down, the council has a strategy and a plan of action for recycling. It includes many kinds of recycling and it tries not to leave anyone out of any part of it. The hon. Gentleman is saying that glass needs to be part of that programme, and that that needs to be a commitment. In my council area, each household has a glass return system and a plastic basin to put the glass into. They can also go to recycling centres, which are

probably no further than three miles from any person. Those are examples of what we are doing in Northern Ireland, where there is a clear commitment, a strategy and a plan through the council, and across the Northern Ireland Assembly as well. Would he like to see more of those kinds of strategies?

**Mr Hollobone:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful and interesting intervention, and I commend his local council for its recycling efforts. There are similar schemes across the four nations, but as I will come on to later in my remarks, the problem with leaving glass out of the deposit return scheme is that it will be a missed opportunity to increase overall glass recycling rates to the best international standards. At the moment, my understanding is that the Government's proposal for the deposit return scheme in England and Northern Ireland will be different from the deposit return schemes in Scotland and Wales, which will include glass. One of the difficulties is that there will be different deposit return schemes in different parts of the United Kingdom.

**Jim Shannon:** Again, to illustrate the point and support what the hon. Gentleman is saying, the recycling schemes in our council area have, in a way, reached their peak. That is a problem. I think he is referring to something that I would fully support—I know the Minister will give her comments on the matter later—which is some way of raising awareness of the fact that there would be a reimbursement advantage for people who are prepared to recycle their glass. In anticipation of what the Minister will say, I will take a copy of the *Hansard* report of this debate and make sure that I show it to the relevant Minister at the Northern Ireland Assembly so that they can do the very same.

**Mr Hollobone:** As usual across so many issues, the hon. Gentleman and I are on the same page. My contention is that the United Kingdom will not be able to achieve the best international glass recycling levels unless glass is included in the deposit return scheme.

As Conservatives, we made a vow to voters to introduce a scheme that serves the public and Britain's precious natural habitats. However, Her Majesty's Government have so far committed to introducing, by 2024, a deposit return scheme across England and Northern Ireland inclusive of only plastic bottles and aluminium cans. Glass is a glaring omission.

A huge 86% of respondents to the Government's first consultation on the deposit return scheme said they want glass to be included but, despite this overwhelming majority support from technical experts, charities, scientists and the great British public, calls for glass to be included have been ignored.

The scheme's current design falls well short of what was promised and will see it fail to achieve what is required. A deposit return scheme that excludes glass runs the risk of being a global embarrassment for a country that seeks to position itself as leading from the front on environmental issues. In its current form, the scheme's design will fail to crack down on glass waste and will miss a wonderful opportunity to protect our natural environments from glass pollution.

The case has been made that including glass is problematic. However, this case has been made by glass industry lobbyists who have a vested interest in ensuring

[Mr Hollobone]

glass containers are not included in such a scheme. One such argument is that glass, once collected, can be hazardous and dangerous for those charged with sorting it for recycling when it becomes broken. This works both ways, as it can also be argued that glass poses a greater risk to the public and pet owners when it breaks down in nature rather than in the controlled environment of recycling plants.

The lack of a deposit return scheme for glass containers poses a very real risk that such containers will continue to end up on our pavements and in our parks and outdoor spaces, where they will be a health and safety risk to UK residents. This public safety danger is unmatched by other containers. In that regard, the scheme's current proposal fails to protect both the environment and the British public.

Additionally, glass industry lobbyists have suggested that the inclusion of glass will drive consumers towards purchasing highly polluting plastic bottles. However, with the public already widely aware of the prevalence and environmental impact of plastic pollution, I contend that these claims are speculative at best. If we are to tackle the waste crisis, we must trust consumers to do the right thing, but it is vital that we arm them with the tools to do so.

British Glass responded to the Government's consultation, which closed on 4 June 2021, citing various concerns that have little foundation, one of which is that the inclusion of glass would have a detrimental impact on closed-loop glass recycling, despite the industry's present inability to increase glass recycling rates. Indeed, British Glass explained in its response how the industry is committed to a 90% collected for recycling rate, and to an 80% remelt target by 2030 that would see 80% of all glass recycled back into new bottles and jars, but the stark reality is that this goal will almost certainly never be realised.

By global standards, the UK lags well behind its international counterparts in the collection and recycling of glass bottles, sitting behind countries such as Ireland, France, Spain, Italy, Belgium and Bulgaria. In 2020, the UK's glass collection rate for recycling stood at just 76%, well below Italy, which boasts a recycling rate for glass bottles of 87%. Meanwhile, across the UK, it is estimated that 5 billion glass bottles are used each year. Under current recycling rates, this means some 1.2 billion glass bottles each and every year are destined to litter our environment or to languish in landfill.

Current systems to raise our collection and recycling rates are lacking. Much of the glass collected across the UK is not suitable for closed-loop recycling, where discarded bottles are turned back into new ones. That is due to the current collection process, which often sees the mixing of different colours and crushing during transportation. However, a well-thought-out, properly prepared deposit return scheme can address these issues with separated collection methods, which will make closed-loop recycling far more viable. That should be considered as a point of urgency, as it is estimated that a well-designed scheme for the UK could improve recycling rates for bottles and cans to more than 90%. At the same time as the Government are also presently consulting on the consistency of kerbside collections in England, with the laudable aim of reducing confusion, through

their DRS plans they are paving the way for potentially four different deposit systems to be in place in the UK. Potential confusion among consumers caused by the current design is likely to undermine the effectiveness of England and Northern Ireland's scheme. Both Scotland and Wales are set to see glass included in their schemes, but a lack of consistency across the UK as a whole, where consumers cross borders routinely, could see us fail to raise glass recycling rates to the levels they need to be, because consumers will not know when and where glass containers can be disposed of. The DRS for drinks containers should be designed with a view to avoiding this confusion and instead empowering the public to do the right thing.

British consumers are overwhelmingly in favour of a scheme that includes all beverage materials and are opposed to the exclusion of glass bottles. A Populus poll commissioned in 2020 by environmental organisation Nature 2030 found some 84% of Britons want all beverage containers to be included in the Government's proposed scheme. That polling was welcomed by campaigners and academics, who outlined how a comprehensive deposit return scheme will give us the best chance to combat litter. What is vital, and something the Government must not ignore, is that the UK is not walking into unproven territory as it looks to deliver its own scheme; a host of countries have already implemented successful and highly efficient deposit return schemes inclusive of all materials. Those have been proven to dramatically increase collection and recycling rates, and can be used as a powerful template for Britain to follow in implementing its own scheme. Crucially, due to their success, those other international schemes prove that the issues raised by the glass industry lobbyists here are unfounded. Indeed, all-inclusive schemes are common across the world. From more than 40 such schemes globally, only three do not include glass bottles and they exclude glass because they already have in place a returnable system specifically for glass bottles, something that the UK currently lacks. Australia implements a deposit return scheme that also covers beverage cartons, while Canada's scheme includes cartons, bags in boxes, and plastic pouches. Finland and Denmark, which are considered to implement world-class return schemes, enjoy incredibly high return rates of 94% and 92% respectively. These successes are widely regarded as being due to their systems being inclusive of all materials, with the simplicity of the system being crucial to achieving the public support needed for these schemes to be a success.

In my view, it makes little sense to deviate from such successful schemes, and even less sense when Scotland and Wales are looking to mirror the international successes. For example, Scotland is set to introduce a scheme that includes glass bottles by August 2023, while Wales is set to introduce a scheme that includes glass by 2024. It is vital to ensure interoperability among the schemes and to help consumers to adopt consistent and responsible behaviour across the four nations of the UK. Not only is the Government's derisory decision to omit glass seeing us fail to be a world leader on the waste crisis on a global scale, but we are falling well behind Scotland and Wales.

In an open letter, some 25 experts in the field recently urged the Government to introduce a deposit return scheme for drinks containers that mirrors Denmark's system. Cross-party politicians, non-governmental organisations

and academics are calling for the Government's scheme to include all materials, including glass, plastic and aluminium. Denmark has a track record of fine-tuning its own scheme to be as effective as possible. It is a ready-made road map that the UK could follow and would help us to avoid the potential pitfalls that we may encounter along the way if we follow our own bespoke path.

I also wish to raise the issue of VAT. The Government currently plan to apply VAT to deposit return scheme deposits on top of the VAT already charged on the drink. The current expectation is that, if there were a 20p charge, it will be gross of VAT—that is, 17p plus 3p—which means that, if the customer does not return the drinks container that they buy, the producer will receive only 17p back instead of the full 20p. The Government will take the remaining 3p in VAT. If we factor in the estimated 28 billion containers on the UK market, that could mean as much as £185 million lost from the scheme through unredeemed deposits—assuming an 80% return rate—in the first year alone. That would create a situation in which the Government in effect end up profiting from the failure of their own deposit return scheme. What is more, adding VAT to the deposit fee effectively imposes a stealth tax on drinks producers, backing the industry into a corner and creating the real scenario of price rises for the products in question.

If the Government are serious about introducing a scheme, they need to avoid the noise from glass-industry lobbyists and deliver a scheme that works for the environment. Pandering to industry calls makes little sense in the face of overwhelming public support for glass to be included. Furthermore, there is a health and safety risk. Glass is a high-carbon, highly polluting material that presents a real hazard to the public once it is discarded in public places. We should look to create a scheme that drives up the collection and processing of such material, rather than one that makes closed-loop glass recycling more unattainable.

In conclusion, the omission of glass from the Government's deposit return scheme represents a real and serious threat to the effectiveness with which a deposit return scheme in England and Northern Ireland can realistically be delivered. Quite simply, its exclusion would be a potential catastrophe for our natural spaces as we all look to stem the tide of drink-container pollution. It also represents a direct betrayal of a promise made by the Conservative party to voters at the most recent general election, when we said in our manifesto that we would introduce a deposit return scheme for both plastic and glass drink containers. I urge Her Majesty's Government to rectify the situation as a matter of urgency and immediately revisit the design of their scheme so as to include drinks containers made from glass.

4.33 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jo Churchill):** If you will indulge me, Mr Deputy Speaker, on the day of the Humble Address to Her Majesty, I wish to add my voice and those of the constituents of Bury St Edmunds to the voices of others in this place who have expressed their deep appreciation of and thanks for Her Majesty's dedication, kindness, good humour and service to our nation. She has visited our great county on many occasions

and I know that we will celebrate, as the rest of the country will, with bunting and fanfare over the coming week. I am looking forward to judging a fancy dress competition in one of my lovely villages.

As a long-term advocate for our natural environment, Her Majesty, I am sure, would be extremely interested in the important subject that we are discussing today. On that note, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) for securing this debate and for the opportunity to discuss the Government's plans for introducing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers.

As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, there is an awful lot going on in this space, driven by our resources and waste strategy and the powers that we took in the Environment Act 2021, which was passed last November. With that in mind, we are proud to be driving forward work across the collection and packaging reforms, which is made up of the deposit return scheme, the extended producer responsibility for packaging and the increased consistency in recycling collections in England to which he referred.

The DRS is pivotal to this Government's commitment to increasing recycling rates. However, we should not overlook that it will provide other benefits. In particular, it will deliver high-quality recyclate for recycling; enable the drinks industry to close the loop on its packaging; help move the UK towards the circular economy, where resources are kept in use longer and waste is minimised, taking us away from that linear throwaway society; deter the littering of in-scope containers; reduce the associated damage to wildlife and habitats; and therefore promote pro-environmental consumer behaviours, with potential knock-on effects on other positive environmental activities.

My hon. Friend has raised some important concerns on behalf of the industry. I want to be clear that our ambition is to introduce a deposit return scheme that works for everyone—for the consumer and across the industries. I know that, in many of our households, across the UK, drinks packaged in metal cans are drunk regularly. For that reason, we all recognise that those cans—light, sturdy, and convenient for storage and transport—have intrinsic qualities that will always make them desirable to consumers and the product of choice. We are of course mindful that any cost to people's purses, or businesses is particularly tough in the current environment, but we do want to introduce policies that encourage recycling and reduce the amount of litter that blights our environment.

Although DRS is a complex policy to introduce, requiring the efforts of multiple industries, in one way, we are lucky. As my hon. Friend said, there are 40 other deposit return schemes out there, in other nations, from which we can learn. Not only are we drawing on the experiences of the roll-out of DRS in Scotland to inform implementation and planning, but I had the pleasure of meeting the Environment Minister from Lithuania, where a scheme was also recently introduced. I have plans to visit Norway shortly to find out more about its deposit return scheme. Norway has not included glass in its scheme, and nor have the Netherlands or Sweden. I note that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is no longer in his place, but I understand that southern Ireland, in its plans for a scheme, is contemplating excluding glass. There is, therefore, a mixture of schemes out there.



[Jo Churchill]

I recognise that there are deposit return schemes with different scope across the United Kingdom, given that glass is excluded in England and Northern Ireland, but we remain totally committed to working with the devolved Administrations to ensure that there is a completely coherent, interoperable system across the UK.

Excluding glass offers us an opportunity to look at how we incentivise reusable schemes for glass. Those containers that are not within the deposit return scheme are within the extended producer responsibility scheme, so exclusion does not in any way mean that we are not making policy to improve the reuse, recycling and resource efficiency of those things. On the question of VAT, as my hon. Friend would expect, we are in discussion with Her Majesty's Treasury. I have met the Financial Secretary on this matter in the recent past, as has the Secretary of State.

Ultimately, DEFRA's ambitious collections and packaging reform agenda cannot be delivered by Government alone. The deposit return scheme will be

an industry-led scheme. For that reason we, alongside colleagues in the devolved Administrations, continue to work closely with all relevant sectors to implement a scheme that is as coherent and aligned as we can make it.

I take this opportunity to thank all those who have fed into the consultations, and those who continue to be generous with their insights and expertise into what is positive about schemes they run and where they think we can improve. That will ensure that we deliver a successful deposit return scheme in England.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Before I put the Question, on behalf of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker team, I wish everybody working at the Palace of Westminster a most glorious, historic platinum jubilee four-day celebration next week.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.41 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

*Thursday 26 May 2022*

[YVONNE FOVARGUE *in the Chair*]

## Antisocial Behaviour and Off-road Bikes

1.30 pm

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of anti-social behaviour and off-road bikes.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Fovargue. I acknowledge that there are many issues facing Parliament at this time, including the cost of living crisis, the increasing cost of fuel and increasing prices of energy and food, but there is also considerable concern about antisocial behaviour and off-road bikes. I know that you share my concerns, Ms Fovargue, and have had examples in your constituency of these terrible incidents, which can cause such trauma to people and have a negative effect on their quality of life.

The public and the police are seemingly powerless when it comes to antisocial behaviour caused by off-road bikes. My purpose in bringing this debate is to seek action from the Minister, which would be in contrast, with all due respect—I have raised this issue several times—to the disinterest shown by the Minister for Crime and Policing, the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), in whom I am very disappointed. I must relay the feelings that have been expressed to me. The public are losing confidence and faith in the police's ability to tackle antisocial behaviour caused by off-road bikes.

There is no doubt about it: off-road bikes are being driven illegally and recklessly on our roads in my constituency of Easington, in the east of our county, and in many other right hon. and hon. Members' constituencies. That is not just my opinion; I hope to show that the police share my and the public's frustration at their lack of powers and the lack of direction from central Government. The police, not just in County Durham, are looking to the Government for the guidance and protection they need to act robustly against off-road bikes causing antisocial behaviour.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), Labour's shadow police and fire Minister, who knows about the Horden Hub House, the Horden masterplan, and the crime and antisocial behaviour that blight that community and other former mining communities in east Durham, because she actually took the time to visit, speak to residents and sit down with community groups. I urge the Minister to do the same. It is comforting to know that we have a friend and ally who is a strong advocate.

Sadly, the public are losing confidence in the police. YouGov routinely asks the public whether they have confidence in the police's ability to deal with crime in their area, and the trends are worrying: 47% of the public lack confidence in the police's ability to tackle crime, compared with only 43% who are confident in the police. Overall, the number of people who believe

the police are doing a good job—this is nationally, not in County Durham—has fallen from 75% to 53% in the past two years. I hope that sets some alarm bells ringing. But statistics do not measure the trauma, and do not paint a full picture of the fear of uncontrolled crime and the sense of lawlessness when antisocial behaviour and criminality are allowed to go on without challenge and intervention. I will give a few examples.

In Westmorland Rise in Peterlee in my constituency, residents have been left frustrated, miserable and in despair after their homes and vehicles were repeatedly covered in mud kicked up by off-road bikes and quad bikes, driven in a fashion to deliberately throw mud on the sides of the houses of the people who were complaining and destroy the green spaces. A respected local councillor, Louise Fenwick, sums up the feelings of the community:

“Not only are these joy riders terrorising residents, but they are destroying Peterlee's landscaping and causing damage to homes.”

After years of antisocial behaviour blighting Shotton, I attended a Police and Communities Together public meeting at St Saviour's church in Shotton. I could barely get in the church hall, but I can only say that the community was left bereft. Residents fear reprisals if they report crimes to the police, with their vehicles often targeted for arson—that is a very common threat. When residents report incidents, they can face extended waits on the telephone on the 101 service, only to be told there is nothing that the police can do.

Representatives of a business that we are all very proud of—I will not name it in this debate, but I am happy to share the details with the Minister afterwards—report how off-road bikes and quad bikes threaten their patrons' lives, health and safety, yet the most basic remedial work is not being undertaken to prevent access to their land. I listened in despair when they said that, had they known the extent of the problems, they would not have invested hundreds of thousands of pounds into their business in my constituency.

Members may be aware of the recent tragic case of a four-year-old boy from Bishop Auckland, in a neighbouring County Durham constituency, who was sadly killed when an off-road bike collided with a lamppost. It is only a matter of time before an incident of that nature happens again. The police tell people to report all crime—that is my message, too—but the lack of action, the difficulties people face in getting through on the telephone lines, and the fear of reprisals lead to an under-reporting of crime. Where people make a stand, they can face life-threatening consequences. I want to highlight a case of that, and I will name the individual, because it has been well documented and he has been very brave: Sean Ivey, a resident of the neighbouring constituency of Sedgfield, whose home was targeted in an arson attack and burned to the ground after he spoke out against antisocial behaviour.

The community knows the solution: more police. The Government will no doubt claim that they are recruiting an extra 20,000 police officers, but that is not the complete picture. True, the Government are restoring the 20,000 police officers they cut since 2010, but unfortunately it is going to take many years to recover those thousands of years of accumulated experience of serving police officers. Extensive and effective community policing and intelligence gathering is the key to addressing antisocial behaviour, and we are paying the price for a decade of Tory neglect and austerity when it comes to crime.

[*Grahame Morris*]

In addition to police, high-quality youth, community and sports offerings can divert young people away from antisocial behaviour. Youths congregating on the street can be intimidating; however, in my constituency, they often have little option, because youth services have been decimated. I must also note that it is not just young people who engage in antisocial behaviour, and it is not all young people. It is a small minority, but where that exists, we can see the community benefits of football clubs, boxing clubs, athletics clubs, cricket teams, cadet services and youth groups.

However, those services have been undermined, with billions cut from council budgets all across the county where there are no safeguards for non-statutory youth and community services. I am old enough to remember the mantra of the last Labour Government: tough on crime, and tough on the causes of crime. Sadly, this Government are failing on both counts. The closure of public services such as libraries, the undermining of community policing, and growing levels of poverty are some of the causes of crime.

In a written parliamentary question, question 70255, I asked the Home Office to produce a national police strategy for tackling antisocial behaviour and crime associated with off-road motorbikes. That question was a direct ask from police officers fed up of explaining to my constituents why they cannot pursue people criminally using off-road motorbikes or adopt practices such as tactical contact, which the Metropolitan police use to tackle moped muggers. Officers who use these tactics do so with the fear they could be jailed or sacked if a rider is injured.

I want to highlight to the Minister the case of PC Edwin Sutton, who faced the sack and loss of his pension from the Metropolitan police after he was accused of breaching professional standards by using a dangerous method to stop a suspected moped mugger in 2017. After nearly 30 years of an unblemished career, PC Sutton went through two years of anguish after the Independent Office for Police Conduct ruled that he should face disciplinary proceedings. It took a tribunal to reject the IOPC position, ruling that his decision to block the rider in the circumstances was reasonable. The chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation, Ken Marsh, said that PC Sutton was effectively “thrown to the wolves”.

The request for a national police strategy for tackling antisocial behaviour and crime associated with off-road motorbikes is a call from police officers asking for guidance and protection when tackling this type of antisocial behaviour. When I raised this issue with the Minister for Crime and Policing, he said:

“The police have powers under the Road Traffic Act 1988 and the Police Reform Act 2002 to seize vehicles being used...illegally without a valid driving licence or insurance or in an antisocial manner.”

That includes motorbikes. The right hon. Gentleman went on to say:

“Decisions on when to use these powers are operational matters for Chief Constables in conjunction with local policing plans. They are best placed to understand how to meet the needs of local communities.”

In January this year, the Home Office updated statutory guidance to support local agencies to make effective use of these powers. In July, the beating crime plan laid out the Government’s plan for tackling crime and antisocial behaviour.

Durham Constabulary uses the powers available to it. Make no mistake: I am constantly lobbying for the police to intervene when there are cases, as there frequently are, of antisocial behaviour caused by off-road motorbikes and quad bikes. However, Durham Constabulary tells me that its powers are very limited. When an individual who is riding one of these bikes—even illegally and without insurance—refuses to comply, they cannot be made to stop. That is incredible.

Section 59 warning signs were put in place in Peterlee in my constituency, in Shotton, Wingate and Darlington, advising offenders of the power to seize illegal off-road bikes, quad bikes or 4x4s without the need to issue a warning. Durham Constabulary implemented Operation Endurance to crack down on antisocial riders. It was a success. It had its launch in the first week in February, in which 24 fixed penalty notices and 18 barring notices were issued, three illegal quad bikes were seized, three speeding tickets were issued, two stolen mopeds were recovered, one illegal off-road motorbike was seized, one other vehicle was seized, a driver was arrested for drug driving and another driver was charged for careless driving.

I posed another question—No. 76647—to the Minister for Crime and Policing and was advised that

“The Government has no plans to introduce an off-road bike national strategy.”

The Government should listen to police officers, who are fighting a losing battle when it comes to tackling antisocial behaviour from off-road motorbikes and quad bikes. Operation Endurance has succeeded, but seizing bikes does not always resolve the issue, with people causing chaos in our communities resuming their antisocial behaviour after sourcing a new bike. As I have mentioned, when people refuse to stop, the police are frequently unable to pursue them, so those involved in crime and antisocial behaviour are allowed to get away scot-free with their offending. The public are fed up with reporting these incidents, watching their communities being blighted, and there not being enough police officers to tackle the problem. I am looking to the Minister today to provide some of those answers.

1.45 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Fovargue. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (*Grahame Morris*) on securing this important debate, as this problem stretches right across the country and the four nations of the UK.

I recently introduced a ten-minute rule Bill to try to address the problem of off-road vehicles—specifically that of quad bikes—and antisocial behaviour. While quads have an important and legitimate use in agriculture and related areas, their careless, reckless and often unsafe use on our streets is a menace. My constituents, quite frankly, have had enough.

Beyond the contributions here today, a number of stakeholders have identified the issue as a massive problem, including my own West Yorkshire Police, the College of Policing, Brake, and the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety. Likewise, the National Farmers Union sees it as a particular problem and estimates that some 1,100 quad bikes are stolen from farms each year, costing farmers upwards of £3 million. If just a fraction



of those end up on public roads, that means hundreds of new illegal quads running rampant on our streets and paths.

Just one antisocial quad rider ripping through a neighbourhood will disturb hundreds and hundreds of residents. That constant noise causes distress to residents and undermines public confidence in our police over a perceived lack of action on it, as mentioned by my hon. Friend in his speech. However, most seriously, they are a risk to other road users, pedestrians, and to the drivers themselves. Only last year, in Bradford, a man was killed when his quad bike veered and collided with another vehicle. The drivers are often not wearing helmets to protect their lives but balaclavas to protect their identities.

My Bill would have required quad bike riders on public highways to wear helmets, created a registration system for all quad bikes, and directly tackled the antisocial element of these vehicles being in the wrong hands. In Northern Ireland, wearing a helmet is compulsory for all quad bike riders on public highways, but that is not the case in the rest of the United Kingdom. The argument is self-evident: without a helmet, when the worst happens, the results are catastrophic. A quad user is twice as likely as someone in a car to get into an accident in the first place, and is 10 times more likely to be seriously injured or killed.

This is neither a local nor a party political problem, but it highlights the gaps in our current legislation that have allowed this problem to manifest and torment communities right across the country. However, those gaps can be very easily addressed. For instance, the installation of immobilisers is not a legal requirement for quad bikes despite being a requirement for all cars since 1998. The device provides an additional layer of security and, by making immobilisers a requirement, we can make theft harder and reduce the number of quads getting on to our streets.

Again, a simple neatening-up of legislation can make a huge difference to people right across the land. Once a stolen vehicle has been seized, police must link the quad bike being used antisocially to an owner and an address. That can take hundreds of hours of police time—piecing together official reports from members of the public, scouring community websites, looking for intelligence on social media, or reviewing CCTV from businesses, such as petrol stations, for that single frame showing the rider's face—all to make a strong enough case to act. Not only is that labour-intensive, but, should any link in that chain break, the police can do very little.

We could extend the registration scheme for licensed road-legal quads to cover all quad bikes, including those allowed for off-road use only, to establish a clear link and line of ownership right from point of sale. That would help police in their enquiries when investigating reports and would mean that, once seized, stolen quads could be more easily returned to their rightful owners.

We need to stop seeing these vehicles as toys. If we continue to let this type of vehicle slip through the cracks in current legislation, we will fail to protect legitimate owners from needless theft, residents dealing with chronic noise, and all road users and pedestrians, who will remain at unnecessary risk, and all of this increases antisocial behaviour on our streets.

It is time we brought in measures to provide consistency, to protect road users and legitimate owners of quads, and to stop the blight of the dangerous and antisocial use of quads on our streets. I hope the Minister will recognise that this is a serious and widespread issue, and that gaps exist in the current legislation, and that he will support the call of my hon. Friend the Member for Easington for further action in this area.

1.50 pm

**Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Fovargue. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) on securing this important debate, which covers the whole country, including both rural and urban areas.

Many constituents have come to me about the disruption caused by off-road bikes being used on patches of land in my local community. The issue affects people everywhere, so this is an important debate to have. My hon. Friend painted a picture of the impact the issue has had on his constituents. He has been brought here to be a voice for those constituents, and he is a strong voice for them on this issue. We all understand the pain that they have gone through and how much he has done to champion their right to a more peaceful life.

We also heard loud and clear the message from the police that my hon. Friend had spoken to. I have had similar, very strong messages from the police about their need for more support. We need to ensure that they have the right powers and the tools they need to tackle the problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) has a lot of experience in this area and a lot of good ideas. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister why those ideas cannot simply be put into practice, as they seem to be very sensible. We need to do something in this area and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about my hon. Friend's suggestions.

Before Christmas, I travelled around the country to get a sense of the breadth and scale of antisocial behaviour more broadly, as well as how it affects people and what is being done about it. The problems caused by off-road bikes came up time and again. Feeling safe in our communities and our homes is a basic right, and I am afraid that after 12 years of Conservative Government our streets have become less safe.

Since the last Government came to power, crime is up 18% and prosecutions are down 18%. Violence against women and girls is at an alarming level. The police are struggling to do all the things we ask of them, while a mental health crisis rages through our country and they end up spending large proportions of their time dealing with some of those issues, which should be prevented elsewhere.

Every day, the impact of noise, graffiti, fly-tipping, drug dealing and misuse, vandalism and antisocial behaviour blights people's lives. My hon. Friend the Member for Easington mentioned Sean Ivey, who I met when I went to Horden. His house was attacked by arsonists after he reported antisocial behaviour. His life was ruined—his house was burned down—and he is campaigning for change, as well as having to rebuild his own life. He wants to fundraise for youth centres, which

[Sarah Jones]

I will come on to, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Easington mentioned, they are a really important part of the picture.

New figures show that rates of arson are spiralling out of control. According to the latest crime survey, arson and criminal damage have risen by over 90,000 incidents compared with 2019, despite the country being in lockdown for the first three months of the year. The proportion of offences leading to a police charge is just 4.3%, down from 8.3% in 2015. Some 58% of investigations are closed without the police identifying a subject, equating to over 280,000 cases. These figures reflect a truly shameful record on crime. Arsonists cause huge damage to local communities, ruining not just people's property but their sense of safety and pride in their community. I am sure the Minister understands the scale of the problems that we are talking about and will perhaps qualify her earlier remarks about antisocial behaviour being low-level crime. I do not think it is, and I know that our constituents do not think it is either.

Turning to off-road bikes specifically, there is clearly a problem. These vehicles are often driven loudly and illegally on roads at great speed, muddying the roads and ruining green space. Often they have been stolen from farmers in rural areas, and I talk to the police about this issue. Another issue, which we will have to talk about another time, is to do with insurance. It is quite technical, but the police are very frustrated because insurance claims on off-road bikes are paid out even if the key is in the ignition, so people can just turn up and steal them. There is work to be done there, but that is more of a matter for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and I will raise it elsewhere.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Easington talked about, action is being taken by Labour police and crime commissioners around the country, who have a grasp of the importance of dealing with this problem. In Gwent, represented by Jeff Cuthbert, 135 off-road bikes have been confiscated in the past year, which is quite some number. In Northumbria, where Kim McGuinness is the Labour PCC, bike and quad seizures have been informed by the use of long-lens cameras to identify offenders, and the police have been working with Crimestoppers to help people anonymously report those using bikes to carry out antisocial behaviour. Northumbria police are also cracking down on garages selling petrol to underage buyers and those with unregistered off-road bikes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington talked about the good work being done in his area, and I thank him for his kind words. I very much enjoyed visiting his constituency; such visits are an important part of trying to understand the issues that people face every day and what we need to do when we are in power. I met constituents and local groups at Horden Hub House in his constituency, and I saw the excellent partnership work that Horden is doing to help vulnerable people, who often have complex needs. I also met the Labour PCC, Joy Allen. As my hon. Friend said, Durham constabulary have introduced higher charges to keep dangerous vehicles off the streets and out of the hands of criminals. On seizure, there is an instant charge of £150 and then a £10 per day storage fee to reclaim the bike. On average, the amount paid to get the bike back is around £200, but only roughly 40% of bikes are reclaimed. If the

rider does not have a valid licence to ride the particular class of vehicle or has no insurance, the only way they can get their bike back is to insure it and get a valid licence before paying the fee.

**Grahame Morris:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent point, particularly in relation to my constituency. May I point out—I am sure she saw this at first hand—the problems that we have in a constituency that is part-rural, part-urban? The organised crime gangs are making use of cycle paths, quad bikes and off-road bikes to distribute drugs. It is difficult for the police if the individuals who are involved in criminal activities refuse to stop. Often the bikes are stolen, and tracking them requires the use of drones and specialist police units on off-road bikes. It is an incredibly difficult problem, and we need a commitment from the Government and policies to support the police and their actions.

**Sarah Jones:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. We had quite some debate during the passage of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, where some changes were made to what happens to police when they are chasing people on roads. There was acceptance that the current situation was unacceptable and that the police were putting themselves into potentially very difficult positions by doing the right thing. The same applies here: we need to ensure that the police can do what they need to do, and stop people when they can, without facing the problems that my hon. Friend talked about and that Ken Marsh commented on, in his usual robust fashion. My hon. Friend makes a clear point. The fact that PC Edwin Sutton had to spend two years waiting, and then go through a tribunal to overturn the IOPC, shows how the rules need to be looked at properly. Everybody got into a tangle over his case. It was not just his life that was put on hold; everybody was obviously struggling with the rights and wrongs of the situation. We do not want to have an entirely John Wayne attitude of, "Police gotta do what police gotta do," but we do need to make sure that police can be confident that by doing the right thing they will not suffer negative consequences.

In Durham, lots of work is under way to tackle some of those issues. There has been some success. I congratulate the police and crime commissioners, who are making a difference, but they need support from Government to go further. We have talked about the need for enough police resources. My hon. Friend the Member for Easington talked about cuts to police, and made an interesting and important point that is not made often enough about the lack of experience that is the result of the loss of those 21,000 police officers. We have also had a 50% cut in the number of police community support officers. There is no plan from Government, unless the Minister wants to mention it today, to put those levels back to what they were. PCSOs are in our communities and neighbourhoods as the eyes and ears of the police force; they do the job that they do so that our police officers can deal with the more serious issues that we are talking about today. There are over 7,000 fewer neighbourhood officers on the frontline now than there were 12 years ago. Over 7,000—that figure is a woeful record for this Government.

I would be very interested to hear what the Minister has to say to my hon. Friends the Members for Easington and for Bradford South, who both asked for perfectly

sensible policy changes. They asked, in particular, for a strategy around how we tackle off-road bikes. I would be interested to hear how that fits into the Minister's wider plans on antisocial behaviour. We know there are many problems with the way that is tackled at a national level, not least the fact that the data on antisocial behaviour is not collected nationally in a proper way. It is very hard to get a full sense of the picture. I would be interested to know whether the Minister has any plans to increase the number of PCSOs—they help our police officers to do their job.

We have made commitments to put police back into our neighbourhoods by having neighbourhood hubs. Neighbourhood hubs mean that everybody knows where to go to interact with the police. It is not just about police; it is also about our local authorities, our enforcement officers and our youth services. As my hon. Friend the Member for Easington said, police can only do the job with the infrastructure that they need around them. All the diversionary tactics that he talked about—youth centres, sports and activity for our young people—are absolutely at the heart of his constituency. I saw that when I visited his constituency, and all the other constituencies I went to. Without the underpinning of useful things for our young people to do, the police will struggle even more. I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent speech, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

2.3 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Fovargue. I join with other Members in thanking the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for securing this debate, and also the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) for her contribution.

I start by making it very clear that I know that antisocial behaviour causes a huge amount of concern and distress for constituents all over the country—as it does in my constituency. We all represent people who experience those crimes. I want to be very clear with the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), and ask her to accept that I have explained to the House on numerous occasions how seriously I take that. I understand the impact of antisocial behaviour, and her characterisation of my remarks does not represent my view, or reflect the work that the Government and I, as a Minister, are doing.

At its worst, such behaviour plagues the lives of victims, stifles communities and ruins the enjoyment of public spaces. The Government will not tolerate that. We have always been clear that we stand on the side of the law-abiding majority, and that includes using every available measure to address antisocial behaviour.

The hon. Member for Easington has rightly raised specific concerns about off-road biking and the harm it can cause communities. Any form of antisocial, dangerous or inconsiderate behaviour involving vehicles, including off-road bikes, is a serious issue. He has suggested that we need a national strategy to deal with this problem; as he has mentioned, he has raised the issue in parliamentary questions. I will set out the Government's response and the work we are doing and explain the rationale for our approach, which is a local approach. I will go into the reasons for that in detail.

I want to make reference to the excellent work of the hon. Gentleman's elected Labour police and crime commissioner. Both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Croydon Central have recognised the considerable power, resource and funding that the Government have given to police and crime commissioners. It is our approach that the best way to tackle policing in this country is to preserve the operational independence of police forces, chief constables and the elected police and crime commissioners, who are directly accountable to their communities. We believe that that is the right way to tackle the worst forms of antisocial behaviour—indeed, all forms of antisocial behaviour.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we need to make sure that the police and local authorities have the tools that they need to tackle antisocial behaviour, including where that manifests itself through off-road biking. We need to make sure that the police are properly resourced.

Members will be aware that we are already over halfway to recruiting our target of more than 20,000 police officers. I want to put it on the record, and remind the hon. Gentleman, that Durham police have recruited 136 additional uplift officers as part of the uplift committed to by this Government, under this Home Secretary, with 90 more officers to come in the final year of the uplift programme. Durham police are fully meeting their targets, and we thank the force for its excellent work getting those officers on to the streets.

On the point about PCSOs that the hon. Member for Croydon Central has made to me on many occasions, it is, of course, a matter for those local police and crime commissioners and local chief constables, if they wish, to recruit those PCSOs. It is for them to decide the best mix of officer skillsets for their local communities. They are close to their communities; they are elected to serve them. It is a decision for them.

**Grahame Morris:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I mean no criticism of either Joy Allen, our excellent police and crime commissioner, or Jo Farrell, the chief constable, who work exceptionally well together and are very responsive. However, it is a bit like having the best plumber in Pimlico—if they have not got the tools, they cannot do the work. With the section 59 notices, even if a police officer apprehends someone illegally driving an off-road motorbike or quad bike, the officer cannot simply stop them without first issuing a warning; then, the second time, they are in a position to stop them. If they refuse, the officer's powers are very limited. Although I am grateful to the Minister for her recognition, I am suggesting that the tools as currently presented to the chief constables, police and crime commissioners and police on the frontline are not sufficient to tackle the problem.

**Rachel Maclean:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point, but I can assure him that I have met Joy Allen myself, not on this issue, but on other issues. I am always happy to meet police and crime commissioners, and I meet a number of them regularly. I would be happy to take specific representations from Joy Allen or from the hon. Gentleman's chief constable on these specific matters. However, as he knows, we keep all our legislation under continuous review. If he will allow me, I will discuss that broader point a bit further.



[*Rachel Maclean*]

The police, local authorities and other local agencies have a range of flexible tools and powers under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. It is an issue with a particularly local dimension and the Act was designed to take account of that. It is for local areas to decide how best to deploy those powers, depending on the specific circumstances. They are best placed to understand what is driving the behaviour in question and the impact it is having, and to determine the most appropriate response. Importantly, the 2014 Act contains measures designed to give victims and communities a say in the way complaints about antisocial behaviour are dealt with. The community trigger gives victims of persistent antisocial behaviour the ability to demand a formal case review. I am happy to provide more details about that if the hon. Gentleman wishes, but his local policing partners are fully aware of it.

As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the statutory guidance for police operational frontline officers is regularly updated, and it has been reviewed again. We have not heard the calls he referred to for widespread changes to the law, but of course we keep these matters under review. We recognise the critical role of local policing and wider partnerships within community groups. That is why, as part of the police and crime commissioners review, we are seeking to improve the effectiveness of the community safety framework, which includes the community safety partnerships.

We are continually looking at whether the tools, powers and frameworks are fit for purpose. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we will not hesitate to act. We have introduced significant legislation to allow policing to tackle the most serious threats to our communities, including the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. We will do a similar thing through the Public Order Bill, the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022 and a number of other measures, including the Domestic Abuse Act 2021—the hon. Member for Croydon Central referred to violence against women and girls. I want to draw the House's attention to the Government's record of legislating when there is a need to keep people, our streets and our communities safe.

In addition to the antisocial behaviour powers, the police have the power under section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002, which the hon. Member for Easington referred to, to seize vehicles, including off-road bikes, being used in an antisocial manner. That can be the result of using a vehicle in a careless or inconsiderate manner, or causing alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public. The enforcement of road traffic law and the deployment of resources is the responsibility of individual chief officers, taking into account local problems and demands.

**Judith Cummins:** Is the Minister confident that the police have the power to seize and destroy illegal off-road quad bikes, rather than seize them and eventually recirculate them back into the system through selling them off?

**Rachel Maclean:** I thank the hon. Lady for her challenge. I am always happy to listen to specific challenges or requests from policing partners. She raises an issue outside the direct scope of my ministerial portfolio, but if she writes to me on these issues, we will look at whether there is a need to change those powers.

I would like to mention a piece of work that we are doing to address an issue that the hon. Lady raised. She talked about insurance, quad bikes and GPS trackers. We know that insurance policies that replace equipment like-for-like with no questions asked encourage a cycle of theft and disincentivise owners from protecting their property. That is why the Minister for Crime and Policing, my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), wrote to manufacturers of agricultural and construction machinery in February, encouraging them to commit to do more to increase security. In the Home Office, we are supporting the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for agricultural theft in ongoing discussions with manufacturers of quad bikes and the insurance industry. There is work going on in this space, and we are always happy to speak to hon. Members about it.

The Home Office announced this year the fourth round of the safer streets fund. For the first time, antisocial behaviour in its various forms is one of the primary crime and issue types being targeted. The hon. Member for Easington will be aware that his constituency has benefited from a successful bid for £444,234 in round 2 of the safer streets fund. That funding was provided to the Durham PCC to carry out a variety of crime prevention measures, including installing windows, internal lights, doors and a number of other local security measures to improve the safety of communities. I hope he has seen that that has had a good, practical impact. I have seen that in my area and many other areas, and I know that it makes a real difference to those communities. We will invest £50 million in safer streets funding all over the country every year for the next three years to give local organisations the resources they need to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour. Our beating crime plan is working—it is delivering results. Communities are safer, and official statistics show that a person is less likely to have their car stolen or their house broken into.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions to today's debate. As I said at the start, we recognise the damage and distress caused by antisocial behaviour, especially that caused by off-road biking, and we are determined to drive it down wherever and whenever it surfaces. It is not acceptable for people—or businesses, as the hon. Member for Easington pointed out—to have to suffer as a result of others' actions. We will continue to support the police and ensure that they have the tools they need to enforce road traffic legislation, including in relation to the antisocial misuse of off-road bikes. I hope I have provided some reassurance that we are committed to tackling these issues head-on.

2.16 pm

**Grahame Morris:** I thank the Minister for her response and her constructive engagement. I am sure we will take up her kind offer to engage and identify some of these issues. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) for her insight and the work she is undertaking, including the visit to my constituency. I also thank my good and hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), who is a fount of knowledge on this issue—not least because she has tabled a ten-minute rule Bill on it—and has proposed some eminently sensible, practical solutions for addressing what is a terrible problem.

Wonderful though the safer streets fund is—we would like to see a lot more of that funding in my constituency—cameras alone are not sufficient to stop these problems, particularly the issue of illegal, criminally ridden off-road bikes and quad bikes, and especially when the individuals concerned are wearing a disguise or a balaclava rather than hard hats, so that we cannot identify them. People do not realise that this problem requires huge police resource—specialist teams, themselves riding bikes, and support teams in 4x4s—to apprehend these individuals, because of the extensive nature of the bridleways and footpaths they use.

I do not want anyone to misunderstand the fact that many people in my communities feel isolated and terrorised. The Minister has said that she does not consider antisocial behaviour a low-level crime, but it is definitely a high-impact crime, and there is a feeling in many communities that we are losing the battle and people are not safe in their own homes. This is not an entirely operational matter; it is a policy matter as well, and I hope that Ministers and the Home Office will engage in addressing the issues we have identified today.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the matter of anti-social behaviour and off-road bikes.

2.18 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Funeral Plan Industry

[JUDITH CUMMINS *in the Chair*]

3 pm

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the funeral plan industry.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mrs Cummins. I am grateful to the Chairman of Ways and Means, for her wisdom in selecting this afternoon's debate; amid the noise and chaos that is the normal week in Parliament, she has provided a space to consider the needs and concerns of decent and often vulnerable people who are trying to do the right thing.

People who buy funeral plans are elderly, and they may be ill—perhaps terminally so. They may have struggled with the cost of a funeral when their spouse died, and they do not want to burden their children with the same anxiety. They may fear the shame of a local authority funeral—a pauper's burial. These are people who have worked hard and saved hard, and they want some piece of mind at the end of life. They are not people who grab the headlines and demand the limelight or who, when something goes wrong, take to Twitter, call their lawyer or send emails in capital letters to their MP twice a day. They may even be quite reluctant to contact their MP, and if they do, it will be politely understated. For that reason it is all the more important that we are here today to ensure that their voices are heard in this place, and I am very grateful to all Members for attending the debate.

The funeral plan industry sees these people, who I think we can all agree are vulnerable, as a lucrative target market. Until now, it has certainly been a huge growth industry. Today, 1.6 million people hold a funeral plan, with 218,000 people taking out a new plan only last year and with over £4 billion in funds under management held in plans. There is huge trust placed in funeral plan providers by vulnerable people, yet this lucrative industry is unregulated.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady share my concerns about some of the practices and sales techniques that are used to get people to sign up to these plans? She has already mentioned that people are vulnerable, but when we read the small print in the glossy brochures that are provided, it is clear that these plans do not actually deliver what has been promised to many people.

**Lucy Allan:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct, and I will come on to some of those high-pressure sales techniques, which I very much hope the new regulatory regime will remove.

The Funeral Planning Authority held itself out as providing some form of oversight, giving itself a veneer of respectability as a quasi-regulator, but it was not, and we have to remember that the industry is entirely unregulated, despite any appearances to the contrary. The Minister rightly took steps some years ago to rectify that omission, and I pay tribute to him for that. Of course, there are good providers, such as Dignity and Co-op Funeralcare, which care about good governance and are working to ensure that this unregulated industry is brought within the perimeter of the Financial Conduct

[Lucy Allan]

Authority by 29 July. However, that creates challenges for the industry, because some providers have not applied to be regulated and some have not been accepted for regulation, for good reason. There are concerns about where that will leave people who hold plans with those providers. I have had useful meetings with Dignity and the FCA, and I am grateful to them for their work in this area.

Let us make no mistake: as the right hon. Gentleman just alluded to, this is an industry with a record of using high-pressure selling techniques, such as cold calling, telesales and having a sales rep sit in someone's kitchen until they sign on the dotted line. People sign up for some extraordinary fee arrangements, whereby 25% of the plan could be taken as commission. Then there is the use of intermediaries, such as will writers, to sell a funeral plan as if it were an add-on, when all people really wanted was a will. They are told that their money is held in trust and overseen by independent trustees, and that it will be ringfenced and invested in blue-chip equities, yet there is a complete lack of transparency as to how their money is invested. Then there is the playing on people's fears, and I am afraid that even the more reputable companies tell people that a funeral plan is an essential part of end-of-life planning.

That brings me to the ironically named Safe Hands Funeral Plans, now in administration. While we can all agree that only a small number of providers pay scant regard to good governance, the industry as a whole has long known about these providers and their practices. I am sad to say that it knew about Safe Hands Funeral Plans and its methods, which were an open secret in the industry. As we move towards regulation, it was only a matter of time before any rogue operators would fail. A number of investigative personal financial journalists have covered this story, and I particularly pay tribute to Jeff Prestbridge for his sterling work in this area. I encourage him and others to keep up the campaign.

When my constituents, Don and Toni Haines, from Ketley in Telford, contacted me about their Safe Hands plan, sold to them by Equity Wills in Market Drayton, Shropshire, it did not take me long to see what had happened to the money supposedly held in trust for the benefit of plan holders. Yes, I am a chartered accountant and I specialised in insolvency, including administrations and liquidations, but even a cursory glance at note 8 on page 6 of the Safe Hands accounts, freely available to anyone online, makes clear that the company is entitled to receive any surplus declared following an actuarial valuation of the Safe Hands Plans Trust—the moneys held in trust for savers could be distributed to a director shareholder.

The surplus declared on the Safe Hands Plans Trust as at May 2020 was £2.4 million. In 2019 the surplus was £10.9 million. It is clear that moneys supposedly ringfenced for plan holders were distributed to director shareholders as a dividend. Did Equity Wills of Market Drayton tell Mr and Mrs Haines that this would happen if they bought a Safe Hands plan? Did Equity Wills check the Safe Hands accounting policies themselves before pocketing their commission? They did not even tell Mr and Mrs Haines they were buying a Safe Hands plan, so my constituents could not even check for themselves.

Digging a bit deeper into the accounts, which of course make full use of the small company exemption to file only limited information, we see that a loan of £3.5 million appears to form part of the assets of the trust, which are ringfenced for plan holders. This loan was advanced to a director of Safe Hands—a Mr Malcolm David Milson, and his wife. By 2020, he was no longer a director shareholder and the advances made to him were not recovered. In anyone's book, this is clearly financial misconduct. The administrators believe that, out of a portfolio valued at at least £60 million, they can realise between only £10 million and £16 million, leaving plan holders with a return of between 10p and 20p in the pound—and we should not forget that that is after they have paid their 25% commission.

Let us call this what it is: theft. Anyone associated with this company should be disqualified as a director, along with anyone who signed off the accounts or certified the surplus. There is a duty of care to the vulnerable. As much as I admire what Dignity is trying to do, in the material that it circulated to Members it has not fully recognised or accepted that these people are vulnerable. It is important that that is acknowledged, and I am sure the Minister will do that in his response.

I am not somebody who uses exaggerated language, because it often diminishes the power of an argument, but what has been happening here is clear: it is what any accountant will call teeming and lading—in other words a Ponzi scheme. As long as the provider keeps selling to new customers to pay the maturing plans of existing customers, there is no problem, but if the music stops—as it did in this case when the provider was prevented from selling any new plans by the FCA as it moved to regulate the industry—the house of cards collapses, leaving vulnerable savers in this instance with 10p to 20p in the pound.

My fear is that Safe Hands plan holders will not be the only casualties. In fairness to Dignity, it has so far underwritten the plans that are now maturing and is working with the FCA to see how it can take plan holders on as clients. However, there is a big concern that its long-term proposal would require plans that are fully paid—we should not forget that most plans are fully paid—to make further payments to Dignity on the basis that people would at least be better off doing that than just having the 10p to 20p in the pound that the administrator would pay. That is not good enough.

The industry knows that nobody needs a funeral plan. Let us not pretend otherwise. A person can tell their children what they want when they die and put their monthly contribution into an ISA or bank account. Why risk it with a funeral plan? Why pay exceptional commissions? If their estate is valued at less than a few thousand pounds, the cost of the funeral gets the first call on the deceased's assets. If there are no assets at all, the local authority picks up the cost.

I am very concerned that some industry lobbyists are seeking to water down the FCA regulatory proposals and are lobbying MPs to that end, and I urge the Minister and the FCA to stand firm. These are vulnerable savers and they must have the gold standard of protection. Watering down the proposed new regulatory regime for the industry would make it easier to become regulated. I understand that we do not want to exclude providers from regulation altogether, but it would be counterproductive. We have been there with the FPA,



which, as we have seen, has provided no regulation whatever, just the veneer of regulation or some form of respectability.

Funeral plans are savings and investment products targeted at vulnerable people, and those savers should have at least the same level of protection as anyone else buying a savings financial product. There is a duty of care to protect the vulnerable from exploitation and mistreatment—I am sure the FCA and the Minister will agree.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Does the hon. Lady agree not only that it needs to be clear what people are purchasing, but that if the people selling the plans are receiving commission—in some of the examples I have come across, the third party selling them has been on commission—that should be clearly stated, too?

**Lucy Allan:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The lack of transparency is a significant feature of where this industry has gone astray.

Protecting funeral plan holders from some of their loss, which is what is suggested, is not good enough, and nor should the industry expect taxpayers to bail it out. This is a problem of the industry's making, and it needs to work together to find a solution. If the industry cuts plan holders adrift, it will have sullied its own reputation, creating longer-term consequences for itself.

This is also about accountability. The auditors, the actuaries, the trustees, the directors and the fund managers cannot just walk away from these vulnerable customers. Why should plan holders with fully paid plans have to pay more to save their funeral plan? It is no good saying that a Safe Hands customer's loss would be less if they paid to switch to a Dignity plan than what would otherwise crystallise from a distribution from the administrator. That is no comfort to anyone. I welcome the steps that Dignity has taken to date, but it must consider whether it, with other reputable members of the industry, can go further.

I know that the Minister wants to do the right thing, and I know that the industry understands that if it wants to survive this financial shock—this battering to its reputation—it too will go the extra mile to do the right thing. The voices of people who work hard, save hard and trust others to do what they say they will do with their money are being heard today by the Minister loud and clear.

I hope the FCA will have no truck whatever with the view that these vulnerable saving plan holders should be treated less favourably than other plan holders. There must in all circumstances be a duty to protect vulnerable customers, a requirement to hold capital to be able to honour the guarantees that are given, and an industry compensation scheme for the plan holders who will be excluded from the financial services compensation scheme. This is an important point. Anyone who will lose out prior to 29 July will not be protected by the financial services compensation scheme. Those people must have a scheme that protects them from losses, and that must be a funeral plan industry scheme. I do not think it should be topped up by the Government. The industry got into this mess, and it needs to work together to get out of it.

I know that, sadly, this matter will not be at the top of the Treasury's in-tray, at what is a challenging and difficult time for all Treasury officials. The Minister is one of my favourite Ministers, and I urge him to make sure that the little people do not end up at the bottom of the pile, and to consider that how we treat the vulnerable says much about our financial services industry as a whole—and, indeed, about our society.

We want to build a reputation for probity and integrity in the financial services sector. There are vulnerable people whose vulnerabilities have been exploited. We cannot just hope that they will not know that they lost the money; that, if they do know, they will not have the capacity to fight for themselves; or that they might die, leaving local authorities to step in. If we do that, we will damage not only the funeral plan industry, but the financial services industry. There are MPs across the House who will not let that happen—I am one of them. These individuals are the people we are all here to represent. I hope that the Minister will allow us all to be part of the solution.

3.15 pm

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I thank the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) for securing this debate.

As the hon. Lady said, this debate concerns some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Do I agree with what she said about whether we need funeral plans? No, we do not need funeral plans. However, there is a reason for them. There are generations of people—certainly in the community I grew up in—who feel a certain shame about leaving nothing for their funeral. As people become ill or grow old, it preys on their mind. They want to avoid the stigma that there used to be of the parish, as it used to be, or the local authority having to pay, and they do not want to be a burden on the loved ones they leave behind.

What is sickening about this scandal—and it is a scandal—is that these individuals have been taken advantage of by a company that knew what it was doing. Like the hon. Member for Telford, I have been contacted by a number of people about Safe Hands Funeral Plans. Having looked at it in detail, it is clear to me that it knew what it was doing. Frankly, it was a scam. Why would someone invest unless they thought that their assets would grow over time and that their investment was guaranteed? But it took profits out, and the only way to plug that hole, as the hon. Lady said, was by recruiting more individuals.

Having spoken to people, I have learned of the scandalous hard sell used to very vulnerable people. It is no good criticising those people and saying that they should have asked questions. A lot of them do not have extensive experience of the financial sector. They might have a bank account; they might save for a pension or have a small pension. What they have not done is look at investments and other areas. They have been taken advantage of.

I agree with the hon. Lady that those individuals did what they thought was the right thing to do, and they should be commended for that. However, they have been left in a position where they are potentially receiving only 10% to 20% of the money they paid in. An Adjournment debate was granted on Safe Hands Funeral

[Mr Kevan Jones]

Plans on 12 May, but there have since been some updates. When the average funeral costs more than £4,000, and people paid in that money, that return will not go any way to covering the cost of a funeral. Are these people in a position to replace that loss by taking another plan out or saving in another way? No, they are not. The company should be called out, which is what the hon. Lady has done, for the way it has acted.

I heard from one of my constituents, who said:

“I am a 70-year-old pensioner, and a few years ago my wife persuaded me to take out a funeral plan in order that close family relatives were not burdened in any way upon end of life. My plan was fully paid up.”

Another said:

“We bought 2 funeral plans several years ago from Safe Hands Funeral Plans. We have just received a letter from the Administrator saying they have stopped trading and it seems our funeral arrangements are now at great risk. We were assured our money was safe and money was held in a trust so there was no risk. We are 75 years old and did the right thing we thought.”

They were lied to. I will come on to regulation in a moment, but could the Minister look at whether criminality has taken place in what Safe Hands has said and done? My constituents were assured that their money was safely put away. It clearly was not if directors were taking money out of the system.

Like the hon. Member for Telford, I think that the Minister tries very hard in a very difficult Department. I have had dealings with him on numerous Committees. He likes to do the right thing within the constraints of the system of that body we call the Treasury. I welcome the moves that have been taken in the Financial Conduct Authority's new regulations, but there are outstanding issues that he needs to pin down.

Nobody should be able to sell a funeral plan without being regulated in any way—that should be a given. As the hon. Member for Telford has said, numerous companies clearly are not going to meet the test because they were never set up to do so, and she has referred to Ponzi schemes. We need a scoping exercise to see what level of scandal this is going to be. It is not going to be on the same level as the Horizon scandal involving postmasters and postmistresses—the hon. Lady and I also got involved in that. It could, however, be huge if companies go unregulated because they do not pass the test, with some ending up insolvent.

The FSCS is vetting funeral plan providers to see if they are fit and proper. Of the 75 funeral companies on its radar, only 32 have been authorised, while 20 indicated that they either do not intend to apply or have yet to seek authorisation, and 13 other providers, including Safe Hands, have withdrawn their applications. If we are not careful, those 13 cases could lead to more scandals similar to Safe Hands. There are also others. If companies are not in the scheme, they should cease trading or not be allowed to sell these plans; otherwise, vulnerable people will be taken advantage of.

We can do all the advertising and awareness raising we want, but the hon. Lady is right to say that this is not a generation of people who are on the internet. They are recommended these things through what they consider to be trusted third parties, and no matter what kind of information campaign we undertake, it is not going to

get through to them. The way to stop the problem is to take the rogues out of this industry altogether through regulation.

Before I sit down, I would like the Minister to address the regulation information available on the FCA website. It states only that companies that do not sign up to new regulation

“might not be authorised by 29 July 2022 and will need to stop selling and carrying out funeral plans in the UK by that date.”

Can we have an assurance that any company that fails to sign up will not be able to provide funeral services after that date?

I would like to finish on the issue of Safe Hands. There needs to be a day of reckoning for the directors of that company. They knew exactly what they were doing. I think there is a case to look at whether criminality took place. As the hon. Member for Telford said, there is no way that the business model stacked up, even if looked at with a cursory glance.

I welcome what the Government have done so far, but will the Minister make sure that the regulation is watertight? His Department also needs to look at the extent to which other companies are going to fall over, because Safe Hands is potentially the first of quite a few. Also, what information can the FCA put out? I accept that this is a very difficult audience to get through to, but questions should be asked when people are signing up to these things. There are alternative ways of saving for their funerals. These types of plans might seem attractive to people when they are given a glossy brochure and sales patter, but sadly they will leave too many people who have worked hard and tried to do the right thing in a very precarious position. In addition to not having the comfort of having paid for their funeral, they may well now be out of pocket by several thousand pounds.

3.25 pm

**Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Cummins, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing this important debate on an issue that I agree needs far more attention. I am surprised that there are not more Members present, but I am delighted that we are able to debate these issues. Although they are important for the Treasury, they also go well beyond its remit and are relevant to other Departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions. There needs to be a much more joined-up approach, but I thank the hon. Lady for bringing to the attention of the House the issues raised by the collapse of Safe Hands. The issues apply to funeral plans generally and wider still to the subject of funeral poverty. I will talk about all of those issues.

I want a society in which everyone can provide a dignified funeral for their family and friends without fearing how they will pay for it or going into debt afterwards. I pay tribute to Quaker Social Action and its Down to Earth campaign for all it has been doing on funeral poverty. I am a member of the all-party parliamentary group on funerals and bereavement, and pay tribute to all the funeral directors who have been working so hard throughout covid, in really difficult and constantly changing circumstances, to provide a crucial service at a time of great need, tragedy and bereavement for so many constituents across the country.

Funeral poverty is when the price of a funeral is beyond a person's ability to pay. It is estimated that 9% of people in the UK are in funeral poverty, so this issue affects people in all of our constituencies, but I agree with the hon. Member for Telford that we do not hear from those constituents very much. At a time of bereavement, writing to their MP about the issues they are facing is not the first thing people think of. Many people are suffering in silence, but there is so much more we could be doing to support them in their time of need.

The UK Government are legally bound by international law to respect, protect and fulfil their citizens' right to the highest attainable standard of mental health. They cannot claim to be upholding that obligation when so many bereaved people in this country experience a significant toll on their mental health because of worries about funeral costs—worries that drive them to buy funeral plans, worries that drove those who have suffered from the Safe Hands scandal. People want to do the right thing. They do not want to be a burden to their loved ones; they want to make sure they are providing. Funeral plans, but also the high cost of funerals in general, are not enabling them to do that.

According to SunLife, funeral prices have more than doubled since 2004. The average cost of a basic funeral is now £4,056, but it is higher in London, and in other places it is considerably higher. It is a huge amount of money. In 2022, SunLife found that 17% of families experienced notable financial concerns when paying for a funeral. Those who struggled had to pay an average of £1,800. Taking on debt in different forms featured highest in how that group made up the costs. For example, 27% of people borrowed from a friend or relative, 22% maxed out a credit card, 17% paid the funeral director in instalments, and 10% borrowed money from a loan provider, such as a bank or a loan shark. Some 16% have had to sell belongings to pay for the funeral of their loved ones. Rightly, those people want to do the right thing. They want to have the most dignified funeral and ensure that they are saying goodbye in the best way, so it is understandable that they want to pay for a funeral plan, but surely there should be another way.

There are three key factors behind the rise in funeral poverty. The first is that the funeral industry is unregulated, meaning that prices can vary dramatically from one funeral director to the next. Until the recent legal order from the Competition and Markets Authority, funeral directors did not even have to display their prices to customers, and many are still failing to comply with the order, eight months on. I have done my own research and gone on the websites of funeral directors to try to compare prices, and it is really hard to do. If someone goes into a shop, they are not told, "Go and pick up whatever you want. Get the right thing and off you go, but we're not going to tell you what the price is." At a time of bereavement, when people do not want to be shopping around, they often rely on a word-of-mouth recommendation from someone who has used a funeral director in the past. People need more information, but it is just not there, or it is not easy to find. The CMA recommended that the Government establish an inspection and registration regime for funeral director services, but the Government have said that they will only take a co-regulatory approach with the industry, so people cannot be guaranteed what service they will get when they choose their funeral director.

Secondly, there is limited public awareness of the price differences. Many bereaved people in a state of grief will not shop around, as I have said; they will opt to get organised as quickly as possible. Thirdly, existing Government support is inadequate, and it has been for a long time. This is where the Treasury comes front and centre. In 2020-21, an average award from the funeral support payment in Scotland, and from the funeral expenses payment in the rest of the UK, was only 44% of the average cost of a basic funeral. The application process for the funeral expenses payment is complex and confusing. In the same period, only 68% of applications were successful.

The DWP established the FEP in 1989 to cover the cost of a basic funeral for those who cannot afford one, and the number of applications is rising. In 2020-21, the average award was £1,838, which falls way short of the average cost of a funeral, leaving a shortfall of thousands of pounds. Many people on low incomes, such as students and low-paid workers, are not eligible for the FEP if they are not on certain in-work benefits, and working out who is eligible and who is not is very confusing. The claimant, and often family members, need to be on certain benefits to apply, and the application process can be complex and confusing. At a time when bereaved people struggle to absorb information, they are least able to work out very complex financial procedures. The eligibility criteria need to be simplified to allow payments to reach more people.

I have in front of me a table showing the applications and awards for social fund funeral expenses payments. In 2010-11, there were 69,000 applications. By 2019-20, the figure had gone down to 37,000 applications, rising to 47,000 applications the next year. That is not an indication of less need, but of how the fund is failing people who are most in need. Despite improvements, processing times still mean that grants are often paid after a funeral has happened, resulting in people needing to commit to a funeral without knowing whether it will be funded, and without the means to raise the funeral deposit. They still have to sell their belongings, or go to a loan shark or relatives, to get the money up front, because they do not know whether they will get the funeral expenses payment afterwards, so it really defeats the point.

The FEP is made up of two parts: the cemetery or crematorium fees and doctor's fees, and an amount towards other funeral expenses, including the funeral director's fees. The "other funeral expenses" element of the funeral expenses payment was increased from £700 to £1,000 in April 2020—the first increase since 2003—but it still falls far short of the money needed. Accessing public health funerals, which is another option that has been mentioned already, is really difficult and has high levels of stigma. People do not feel that a public health funeral is an acceptable and dignified send-off for their relatives, but that could really change if we wanted.

What needs to happen? We need to increase the amount of the FEP and FSP to cover the actual cost of a basic funeral. We need to revise the eligibility criteria for the FEP to enable more people to access it, along the lines of the much more flexible and inclusive FSP brought in by the Scottish Government. We need to establish an independent inspection and registration regime for the funeral industry, as recommended by the CMA, leading to full-scale regulation and price controls for funerals.



[Fleur Anderson]

The prices cannot just keep on going up exponentially. We need to create statutory minimum standards for public health funeral provision. The current guidance is just that—only guidance—and it is not being followed by a significant number of local authorities.

Just imagine, if you will, Mrs Cummins—I hope I can recruit a lot of people to my campaign with this—that if someone wanted to organise a funeral for their loved one, they could go to their local council website and easily find a well signposted package for a highly dignified but affordable funeral, available to all and negotiated with local funeral directors. That would give everyone the option of not feeling the pressure to get a funeral plan, but also not having to spend ever-increasing amounts on expensive funerals. In fact, that could be the norm. It would have to be negotiated with local councils, and it could be done with the Government, local councils and industry working together. That would be a paradigm shift and would be fantastic. I would definitely opt in for that kind of funeral—one that is affordable, but dignified.

I welcome the regulation of prepaid funeral plans, but we need the Financial Conduct Authority to be proportionate in its approach to that regulation. Does the Minister know how many consumers will be left without a funeral plan should their firm not qualify for the upcoming regulation? Will the Government put in place a financial support package to protect consumers should their plan provider fail to achieve FCA authorisation?

The Safe Hands collapse must be a wake-up call, not only for the industry but for Government. I hope to see a wholly different approach, with the Government and industry working together. Funeral cost options are not clear, fair or competitive, and they take advantage of people at their most vulnerable time. Many funeral plans are ripping off people who want to do the right thing and not be a burden to their loved ones. Grief is a human right, not a luxury.

3.37 pm

**Richard Thomson** (Gordon) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) not only on securing this debate, but on the manner in which she has pursued this issue on behalf of her—and all of our—constituents.

Funeral plans are something that I have always tried to avoid considering, in the normal run of things. We have heard all about the hard sell that can go on, whether through the glossy brochures or the sales patter. However, the soft sell can be every bit as pernicious. Without being flippant, I gave an interview to a TV company that is, it is fair to say, a considerable way down the electronic programme guide from the BBC or ITV. While I was waiting to see when I would come on, it seemed that just about every other advert between programmes was for burial or cremation.

Clearly, an awful lot of marketing effort was going into that, and it was going straight into people's homes uninvited. I was struck by the techniques—the soothing music, the images of sunsets and the reassuring voices talking about giving you and your loved ones peace of

mind. Every heartstring was pulled about the inevitability of requiring a funeral, the reassurance that you would give your loved ones by taking responsibility in this way—you would be taking the worry out of things for yourself and your family—and the fact that it was all so incredibly easy, if only you phoned the 0800 number scrolling along the bottom of the screen. Clearly, that works; as we have heard, the industry is worth £4 billion.

I would like to dwell a little on the scandal of Safe Hands, which seems to have operated thoroughly dishonestly, exploiting that desire among very vulnerable people who did not wish to be a burden. Safe Hands had 47,000 customers and was supposedly operating a ringfenced trust fund in order to protect customer investments and guarantee that paid funeral whenever the time came. Instead, it has seen funds misappropriated, with a £2 million surplus being paid out to the company and another £2 million paid in shareholder dividends, in one particularly egregious set of transactions. I can only begin to imagine the distress that the collapse of this company has caused, not only to those who had invested their money in this plan and expected their family to have those end-of-life burdens eased, but also to those who had invested in similar, more reputable schemes.

The hon. Member for Telford has already filleted that company's accounts far more cleanly than I could ever hope to, but I think it is worth dwelling on the fact that the private equity bank company used two fund managers to invest customers' money, one of which has gone into liquidation. It has about £4 million in cash, as well as shares listed in UK firms, which can be sold. A significant proportion of that money went into high-risk investments—often offshore—and some £60 million of the trust assets were in those high-risk investments. Now the administrator, FRP Advisory, is saying that a more reasonable valuation would be somewhere between £10.6 million and £16.1 million, which means that customers might only expect to get, at tops, about one fifth of their investments back. That means that with the average cost of a funeral hitting about £3,000, customers may only get about £600 back.

From 29 July, the industry is to be regulated—in a financial sense, at least—by the Financial Conduct Authority. That is a very welcome and long-overdue measure. As has been said, a funeral plan is not in itself necessary to pay for a funeral. It is no more and no less than any other kind of financial savings product, and it ought to be regulated in exactly the same way, with the same level of transparency expected over fees, commissions and how it operates. Those who administer it should have the same amount of accountability, the same amount of due diligence should be expected and we should have the same solvency expectations as we would for any product of a similar nature.

While the regulation from 29 July is highly welcome, there is a danger to it coming in. As we have heard, 75 companies are on the radar, and slightly fewer than half have submitted an application to be authorised that is still current. Some 20 have indicated that they do not intend to apply or have yet to start the process of seeking that authorisation, and 13 have withdrawn from the process entirely. First, we need to make sure that as many as possible come under the umbrella of that regulation from 29 July. We need assurances for people who have funeral plans in those unregulated companies

that their investments can be protected and that the products deliver what people were promised when they signed on the dotted line.

We also need to make sure that we are doing something for those who will inevitably be left high and dry. Dignity, one of the UK's largest undertaking firms, has for the next six months agreed to provide funerals for Safe Hands customers on a not-for-profit basis, and it will thereafter look to offer plans to surviving customers. That is good, but we need to recognise the very real danger of market failure and other providers not stepping up. I am uncomfortable about that. We need to make sure that there is some form of safety net so that those customers are protected as far as is reasonably possible.

The hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) highlighted eloquently and knowledgeably the issues around funeral poverty and how families can be pushed into debt at a time of enormous distress. Such families may, with the best will in the world, not be the most financially savvy, and in that time of grief they are that extra bit vulnerable, especially given the emotional distress and the timeframes involved in arranging a funeral. As a result, they may find themselves being pushed into choosing options that are not the best for them and that they would not take if they had a full gamut of advice available to them. It risks placing them in the hands of the unscrupulous and making poverty deeper than it needs to be.

Over the last few years, the Scottish Government have taken steps to try to assist with funeral poverty. They have been working to help people with funeral costs, including through the funeral support payment, which is one of eight social security benefits that have been devolved. That should be seen in the context of a wider set of actions that have been set out in the Scottish Government's funeral costs plan, which is designed to reduce funeral poverty and help people to manage and mitigate the overall costs.

Social Security Scotland delivers the funeral support payment. It supports eligible individuals in receipt of low income benefits with a payment to help cover funeral costs. It is a one-off payment that helps to cover any reasonable burial or cremation fees and some travel costs, and it includes a standard flat rate of £1,000 when the client does not have a funeral plan.

That still leaves a great deal to be done. I am very attracted to the idea, which the hon. Member for Putney mentioned, of having a go-to section that does not direct people in any particular way but offers signposts to the various available funeral options. I think that has a great deal of merit, because simply knowing that there is a place where they can go to get information would give people a great deal of comfort in the time of their greatest distress.

This has been a useful and timely debate, but it is one that we will need to revisit, not just in terms of the impact of regulation and the benefits that that will bring, but because we need to consider the impact of companies that, for whatever reason, do not end up under the FCA's regulation. Beyond the finances, we need to take a close look at a whole range of practices to ensure we protect the most vulnerable people in society, whether they are people taking measures to pay for their funerals in advance or relatives left behind at a time of great distress and vulnerability. I am sure that

the hon. Members for Telford and for Putney will continue most ably to focus Members' attention on that as we move forward.

3.47 pm

**Abena Oppong-Asare** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing the debate. She set out some important issues in her opening speech. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) and my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) for sharing their constituents' stories and for their work in this area, which they have been doing for some time.

Many examples that hon. Members cited were extremely worrying and were distressing for those concerned. Funerals are clearly important and sensitive moments for families as they say goodbye to their loved ones. They should not be moments where families have to worry about money. As the hon. Member for Telford and my hon. Friend the Member for Putney pointed out, not many families would have reached out to their MPs during their moment of grief for further assistance in this matter.

That is why the collapse in March of Safe Hands, a prepaid funeral plan company, has left its 45,000 customers in such a distressing situation. Those customers have now been told they will lose up to 90% of the money they had invested in their funeral plans. In many cases, this will see them lose thousands of pounds. It appears that in the case of Safe Hands, customers' money was invested in high-risk investments, as well as being distributed to directors in loans and dividends. Will the Minister set out the facts, as he understands them, about this particular case?

It is very welcome that Dignity, one of the UK's biggest undertakers, has agreed to provide funerals for Safe Hands customers on a not-for-profit basis for the next six months. I echo what the hon. Member for Telford said about thanking Dignity for its work in this area.

As we have heard, the collapse of Safe Hands comes at a critical moment for the funeral plan industry, which will come under the remit of the Financial Conduct Authority from 29 July this year, so I welcome the opportunity to debate the industry and press the Minister on the steps the Government are taking in this area. I do not intend to speak for long, but I have a number of questions for the Minister about how Safe Hands's collapse was allowed to happen and how we can be reassured that the action the FCA is taking will be sufficient.

First, when did the Government begin to assess the significant risks in the prepaid financial plan sector? Fairer Finance has said that Safe Hands's collapse was on the cards for some time. Indeed, its managing director has written that firms such as Safe Hands were playing fast and loose with clients' cash, and other hon. Members have also raised that point. Does the Minister think the new system of regulation was too slow to be developed and introduced, particularly given that the risks were known for some time?

Secondly, does the Minister think there are systemic risks in the sector, rather than just problems with individual firms? Thirdly, will he tell us about the work he is doing

[Abena Oppong-Asare]

with the FCA to protect people who have plans with companies that do not become authorised with the FCA or merge with another firm? Of course, we welcome the FCA's regulation—recent events have shown how necessary it is—but we must be reassured that the process of moving to the new system does not put more people's money at risk. When I last checked, 14 firms had withdrawn their applications for FCA regulation, four firms had not made any application at all, and 16 firms intended to transfer their plans to another provider. As my hon. Friend the Member for Putney said, the customers of all those companies need clarity and certainty about what will happen to their plans and money.

I want to end by making a slightly broader point about consumer protection and regulation. Clearly, the Treasury cannot underwrite every single financial product in this country, but that is exactly why consumers deserve robust regulation of the industries concerned. It is increasingly clear that the Government are too often willing to leave individuals to fend for themselves in self-regulated markets, rather than take action to protect consumers. For instance, why have they delayed the insolvency and audit reform Bills that are needed to regulate those sectors properly? Why has the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill been published only in draft form, with no clear timetable for it to become law? Finally, and most relevant to this debate, why did it take the Government so long to regulate the funeral plan sector properly? The customers of Safe Hands with prepaid funeral plans deserve answers to those questions; I hope the Minister is able to provide an answer.

3.52 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):**

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I thank hon. Members who contributed to the debate: the hon. Members for Putney (Fleur Anderson) and for Gordon (Richard Thomson), the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), and of course my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), who has professional experience in this domain and used her accountancy and forensic skills to examine some of the issues relating to Safe Hands. They are very relevant to some of the things we need to discuss this afternoon. I know she cares deeply about these matters, and I will try to attend to the points that have been made during the debate.

That people care so much about funerals is not particularly surprising. No one needs to explain to me the important role they play in celebrating the marking of a life and helping bereaved families and friends say goodbye to their loved ones. I have said previously that no one nearing the end of their life, or their families, should be consumed by money worries relating to the cost of their funeral. The hon. Member for Putney raised a number of issues about the broader nature of support for funeral provision. I will probably not be able to attend to them this afternoon, but I note those points and I will try to secure an answer for her.

Safe Hands's going into administration will naturally be very upsetting for its customers and their families, and those consumers will, of course, be anxious to

know who will look into the behaviour of the company and its directors. A number of points have been raised about that, particularly by the right hon. Member for North Durham. Within three months of any administration, the administrator must report to the Insolvency Service on the conduct of the directors prior to the company's failure. In addition to the Adjournment debate and some of the points made during that debate two Thursdays ago, more points have today been made, helpfully putting on the record some of the concerns about those behaviours. When that administration process has concluded, those matters will obviously be there to be taken up. I understand that, where there is misconduct that shows people to be unfit to be a director, they may be disqualified from acting as a director for up to 15 years where that is in the public interest. Separate criminal investigations may also be undertaken in any administration where evidence of criminality is uncovered. However, it is only right that at this stage we await the outcome of the administration process.

As hon. Members will be aware, and as has been mentioned this afternoon, Dignity, one of the UK's largest funeral plan providers, stepped in to provide funerals for Safe Hands customers, following the firm's entering administration. I have met with Dignity myself, in the Treasury, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Telford has met with Dignity as well. I am very pleased that Dignity has now agreed to do that—at no additional cost to plan holders—for a further six months.

Although the Financial Conduct Authority does not yet regulate funeral plan providers, it is currently going above and beyond its legal duties by helping to support the industry and administrators as they look to find a longer-term solution for Safe Hands customers. I am hopeful that customers will not need to wait too much longer before they see further progress on a longer-term approach. The example of Safe Hands clearly demonstrated the need for a better-regulated funeral plan market, because although the sector provides a valuable service, we must ensure that the situation that has developed for Safe Hands customers is not repeated. That was the purpose of the work that has been done.

**Lucy Allan:** The Minister is making very important points, so I am grateful to him for giving way. He is talking about the Safe Hands plan holders and arrangements for them. A question that has come up today is what provision will be made for the plan holders who will be within unregulated products after 29 July, because it does appear likely that a significant number of plan holders will be holding a plan that is not backed by any form of compensation scheme or regulation.

**John Glen:** Going forward, people either are regulated—those who are going on the journey into regulation by the end of July go under FCA regulation, and it will be keeping an eye on their selling practices—or become an appointed representative of a bigger, regulated firm, which keeps an eye on them, and then the FCA keeps an eye on it. Many firms, most firms—I think it is in the order of 67 firms—are going through the journey into regulation. There will be smaller firms that decide not to go on that regulatory journey, and either they will become authorised under the appointed representative regime or they will wind down, and return the funds to their customers.



Those are the two options. The FCA is working with the industry to smooth that journey. The House passed a statutory instrument to ease that process of transition. But those are the options available. Of course, we are midway through that journey, but what this afternoon's debate has shown is the imperative of the industry working to sort out some of the issues that have been laid bare by the Safe Hands experience. I think Safe Hands is an exception, but it is a pretty awful experience for those customers. My belief is that this process of regulation will give clarity to the situation, going forward, in terms of who is regulated, how they are regulated and what being under regulation, either as an appointed representative or directly from the FCA, means. The FCA will be responsible for communicating that.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** I thank the Minister for his explanation. My fear and, I think, that of the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) is that there may well be other companies like Safe Hands out there that will not go down either of those routes, so I am interested to know what the timescale will be on that. In relation to Safe Hands, he talked about the administrators. What powers does the FCA have if it finds, in those smaller companies, clear scams? I would use the word "scams", because that is what I think Safe Hands clearly was. What powers does the FCA have then to force the closure of those schemes?

**John Glen:** As I said, it is difficult to be precise in all circumstances because every situation is different. The purpose of giving the FCA that authority is that it has the powers to fine, regulate and insist on certain levels of transparency. Ultimately, if firms that go into regulation do not align with those expectations, the FCA has the power to wind down those firms—in extremis. At this point we are at the start of the journey. The conversations I have had with Dignity—

**Mr Jones:** Will the Minister give way?

**John Glen:** I will certainly give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a moment. Dignity has set up processes to ensure that they continue to comply with those regulations. Those firms that do not choose to be regulated, or do not choose to go under the appointed representative regime, will be obligated to wind down those plans and return those funds. Forgive me; I cannot give absolute clarity on the detail of that process, but I am happy to engage with the right hon. Member for North Durham beyond this Chamber to give him more clarity.

**Mr Jones:** I appreciate that the Minister has been very helpful with what he has described. However, my fear is that some of those small companies may keep trading and taking money off people when we know that they are not being regulated. Are we going to get to a date beyond which, to sell a funeral plan, a company has to either be covered by the FCA or go down the route just described? That will then give assurance to customers that at least there is some protection. I am not going to ask the Minister what that date is, but we do need some indication.

**John Glen:** My understanding is that the intention is for that process to commence at the end of July. In terms of the transition and the guidance to customers, I would need to refer to the FCA on that. I shall write to

the FCA and make that letter available to the House of Commons, so that people can be clear about what the situation is.

Among the questions that the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead asked me was one about the Government's actions to this point. We have taken action and we did legislate to bring providers and intermediaries within the regulatory remit of the FCA. That means that from 29 July, funeral plan providers will be subject to robust and enforceable standards on the sale of their plans. In future, consumers will have greater clarity and understanding of what is covered by their funeral plans, and will not be exposed to misleading or high-pressure sales tactics—an issue raised by the right hon. Member for North Durham. For the first time, funeral plan customers will also be able to take advantage of a redress scheme provided by the Financial Ombudsman Service, and benefit from the protection of the financial services compensation scheme. That reflects the point about this being a financial services product, raised by the hon. Member for Gordon. Indeed, we have seen a massive growth in that over the period between 2016 to 2019—a growth of, I think, 175%.

That is why we are doing it. We want to ensure that there is proper regulation that is meaningful and give consumers real assurance around what protections exist. It is also about proportionate regulation. Across my brief as Economic Secretary, I want to be able to boost competition and protect consumers. That is exactly as it should be. That is what drives me in the other areas of regulation that I am looking at, such as buy now, pay later. At the same time, the Government very much recognise the impact of the change that regulation represents for providers. That is why we introduced a transition period before the new rules came into effect—to give businesses the chance to prepare and adapt.

A key priority has been to minimise any disruption to customers resulting from the transition to regulation. The FCA has therefore said that providers who decide not to obtain authorisation, or cannot obtain it, should either wind down before the regulation comes into force or transfer their plans to a provider that will operate under the new rules. The Government recently laid a supplementary statutory instrument to make such transfers easier. That is in line with my responses to earlier interventions—I am glad my speech is in line with my head.

We are aware, of course, that when we bring a sector into regulation for the first time, some providers may be unable to meet the authorisation threshold. That point has been raised with me in representations from my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) and representatives of the industry. The inability to meet those new standards due to issues with conduct, business models or trust arrangements does not mean that the regulation is at fault. Rather, the regulation is acting as a cleansing agent, weeding out unsustainable practices and preventing future consumer detriment.

Some Members have asked whether the Government are likely to compensate Safe Hands's customers. I do not think it would be appropriate for us to set the precedent or expectation that the Government will use taxpayers' money to compensate consumers for the misconduct of unregulated firms. The Government's role is instead to ensure that appropriate regulation is in

[John Glen]

place to guard against such failures. However, the action of Dignity to take a lead as one of the biggest industry players, to make provision for an initial six months and develop a transition option for those who unfortunately are victims of the Safe Hands situation, is very welcome, and I call on others in the industry to follow Dignity's example. We do not anticipate that there is something else on the scale of Safe Hands out there; we can never be sure—I do not have a crystal ball. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on the industry to continue to work with the regulator to find enduring solutions for as many people as possible.

There is no doubt in my mind that, by acting to protect consumers through a robust regulatory framework, we are doing the right thing. There was a consensus across the House: it was not just this Government, but Members from the Scottish National party and the official Opposition, who called for this action three or four years ago. A well-regulated market will also promote effective competition and do the right thing by consumers over the long term. As I have said, Safe Hands customers have been assured that they will be covered for at least another six months, and I implore others in the industry—other market participants—to take further action to protect consumers of firms that will not become authorised. Taking such action is good for consumers, but also for the reputation of the funeral plans sector. To that end, the Government and the FCA will continue to work closely with each other and the sector to ensure that the shift to regulation is as smooth as possible. That is what funeral customers deserve, and it is what they have a right to expect.

I will reflect on this debate, and if there are any matters that I feel I have not adequately dealt with, I will write to Members and publish a copy of that letter for the House to see.

4.8 pm

**Lucy Allan:** I am very grateful to all Members who have attended today's debate. I know we are competing with the platinum jubilee address to Her Majesty; in fact, the Member who has just sat down in the main Chamber, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), is the Member who secured the Adjournment debate on this topic two weeks ago. There are many Members from across this House who would have wanted to be here, making some of the points that have been so ably made by other colleagues.

I am particularly grateful to the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones). He spoke about the abuse of trust, and a day of reckoning coming for those people who engage in these types of activities. He is absolutely right: financial misconduct is something we cannot tolerate when it targets the most vulnerable in our society.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), because I met somebody the other day who told me that she is almost as good as her

predecessor. [Laughter.] That is a very fine compliment to her, because I worked closely with her predecessor for many years. The hon. Lady was absolutely right to talk about dignified funerals: that is a vital issue, and I am pleased that she has also highlighted the issues of anxiety, worry, stress, and all the other things that happen in this market where these selling techniques are used. Both the hon. Member for Putney and the right hon. Member for North Durham talked about people wanting to do the right thing, and we as parliamentarians are here to promote that, support those people and ensure that those who do the right thing do not get penalised by people seeking to exploit them. That is why this debate has been so important.

I am grateful that the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson) talked about people who are selling peace of mind, because that is exactly where things have been going wrong. We all crave peace of mind, and if somebody is going to sell it to me in a bottle, I am going to pay for it. Taking money from people by creating fears and then not delivering on promises is a disgraceful abuse.

I am grateful to the Minister for everything he has said today, and have absolute confidence that this is something that will stay in his in-tray—somewhere in the middle of his in-tray, perhaps—and continue to have his close attention. The FCA is doing a great job, although it needs to recognise that it was maybe a bit slow to the party. These things have happened on the FCA's watch.

**John Glen:** I would respectfully say that in the end, this has to be the responsibility of Government, because we mandated the FCA to do this. The Government must take responsibility, not the FCA, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that it is now incumbent on the FCA to get this right, and I believe it will.

**Lucy Allan:** I thank the Minister for that point. The FCA always talks about things being within or without its perimeter, and I sometimes wonder how a savings product targeted at the most vulnerable could ever have been without its perimeter. I agree that it was the Government—and, in fact, the Minister—who made sure that this issue came within the FCA's auspices, and it is now working constructively with industry players and Members of Parliament, which is extremely important. I will continue to champion the interests of vulnerable people whose vulnerabilities have been exploited, and I know many others will join me in doing so. Mrs Cummins, thank you very much.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the funeral plan industry.

4.11 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

*Thursday 26 May 2022*

## LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

### Intergovernmental Relations Quarterly Report

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (Michael Gove):** Today, the UK Government published the report of our engagement with the devolved Administrations in quarter one of 2022 on gov.uk.

The report covers a period where we have seen unprecedented events, and gives an insight into the extensive engagement between the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive between 1 January and 31 March 2022. During this reporting period the Administrations collaborated on a number of areas, not least the domestic response to the Russia and Ukraine crisis, including the Homes for Ukraine resettlement scheme, and continuing work on covid-19 recovery.

The report is part of the UK Government's ongoing commitment to transparency of intergovernmental relations to Parliament and the public. The UK Government will continue with publications to demonstrate transparency in intergovernmental relations throughout 2022 and beyond.

[HCWS68]

## ATTORNEY GENERAL

### Disclosure Review and Guidelines

**The Attorney General (Suella Braverman):** I should like to provide details of the annual disclosure review 2021-22 and the corresponding amendments to the Attorney General's disclosure guidelines.

Following the significant changes to the disclosure guidelines, which came into effect on 1 January 2021, I committed to undertake an annual review of the guidelines, which has now concluded, and alterations to the guidelines premised upon the review's findings have been made.

The vast majority of the disclosure guidelines remain as they were when they came into effect on 1 January 2021. The changes have focused on four primary areas:

Third party material access—the provisions for accessing third party material are now expressed in a staged manner to aid with their application by busy investigators, disclosure officers and prosecutors. The principles are also strengthened in line with the dicta of the Court of Appeal in *R v. Bater-James & Anor* [2020] EWCA Crim 780. Investigators and prosecutors are also now explicitly required to keep written records of the reasons for making third party material requests, and to balance such requests with the privacy rights of those affected.

Material presumed to meet the test for disclosure—this section of the guidelines has been subject to limited restructuring in order to clarify that material contained in a crime report

need only be provided once, via the provision of the crime report, and need not be duplicated where it appears elsewhere. Important clarifications to the practicality of providing large video files, especially body worn videos, have also been made to aid investigators.

Defence engagement—throughout the guidelines, guidance as to how and when the defence should provide information to the prosecution has been clarified and where appropriate made more definitive.

Redaction annex—a new annex has been added clarifying how investigators should meet their data protection obligations when providing material to the CPS for the purposes of a charging decision.

The Government are keen to ensure that victims get efficient and effective justice, and that investigations and prosecutions are not impacted by undue or needless burdens being placed on the police. These changes will assist in enhancing the efficiency of disclosure and offer clear, rigorous and practical guidance to support this end.

I will place a copy of the updated disclosure guidelines in the Libraries of both Houses so that they are accessible to Members.

[HCWS58]

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Business Update

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully):** As part of the second statutory review of the pubs code and the pubs code adjudicator (PCA), the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will today publish a 12-week long invitation to stakeholders with an interest or experience of the operation of the pubs code and the performance of the PCA to provide their views and evidence on these matters.

The great British pub lies at the heart of our communities and, as well as providing accessible jobs and prosperity, acts as a hub within local communities and provides space for people to connect and socialise.

There are a range of different types of operating models for pubs and in 2016 legislation came into force in England and Wales to tackle concerns specific to one type of the operating model: the tied pub model in which the tenant agrees to buy beer and other products from their landlord in return for lower rent and other benefits. The Pubs Code etc. Regulations 2016, applying to England and Wales, ensure the fair and lawful treatment of tied pub tenants of large pub-owning businesses. The pubs code also provides the tied pub tenant with certain rights, including the right, in certain circumstances, to require the landlord to offer a change to their commercial contract from a tied tenancy, to a free-of-tie tenancy.

The role of the PCA is to investigate and enforce compliance with the code, provide advice, consult on and issue guidance, and arbitrate disputes in respect of compliance with the pubs code. The PCA is appointed by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.



The Secretary of State is required by the legislation to review periodically the operation of the pubs code and the performance of the PCA. The first such review, covering the period from when the pubs code and the pubs code adjudicator first began to operate in 2016 until 31 March 2019, was completed with the publication of the Secretary of State's report in November 2020, a copy of which was laid before Parliament. This second review covers the 3-year period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2022.

The invitation to submit comments and evidence can be accessed through the gov.uk <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pubs-code-and-pubs-code-adjudicator-invitation-for-views-on-the-second-statutory-review-2019-to-2022> and stakeholders have until 17 August 2022 to respond. A report on the findings of the review will be published as soon as practicable and laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State.

The terms of reference for the second statutory review of the pubs code and the PCA have today been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

[HCWS66]

## CABINET OFFICE

### Data on responses to correspondence from MPs and Peers in 2021

**The Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg):** The Government attach great importance to the effective and timely handling of correspondence, and recognise that the right of parliamentarians to take up issues with those in Government underlines our accountability as Ministers.

I am today publishing a report on the performance of Departments and agencies based on substantive replies to correspondence received from Members of Parliament and Peers in 2021. While individual Departments and agencies are accountable for their own performance, the Cabinet Office is publishing this data to improve transparency and highlight where the Government have effectively handled correspondence.

The footnotes to the table provide general background information on how the figures have been compiled or affected by departmental restructuring. We have also now added in a mandatory 20 working day response percentage to enable a more accurate comparison across Government.

A copy of this report will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses in Parliament.

[HCWS59]

## DEFENCE

### Reserve Forces and Cadets Association External Scrutiny Team Report 2021

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):** I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of a report into the condition of the reserves and delivery of the Future Reserves 2020 programme compiled by the reserve forces' and cadets' associations external scrutiny team and a copy of my response to the report. I am most grateful to the team for their work and I look forward to receiving their future reports. Defence is

considering a number of ideas about the possible further development of the reserve forces and the EST's reports can provide useful information as this consideration continues.

[HCWS60]

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### BBC Mid-term Review and Framework Agreement

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries):** The Government have today published the terms of reference for the BBC mid-term review, setting out our plans to review the governance and regulation of the BBC at the midway point of the royal charter. This will build on changes to the framework agreement with the BBC which the Government have also published today, which add new BBC reform commitments to the agreement across a range of areas.

This is the first time a Government review of the BBC has happened mid-way through the BBC charter, the 10-year agreement which forms the constitutional basis of the BBC.

The review will, in line with the parameters set out in the charter, examine the effectiveness of the BBC's governance and the framework by which Ofcom holds the BBC to account in a range of areas. This includes impartiality, accountability and transparency, handling of complaints, and how the BBC represents the breadth of the audience it was established to serve. It will also look at how the BBC and Ofcom assess the market impact and public value of the BBC and how that relates to its role in the UK media landscape.

The review will be undertaken at pace by officials from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, on the basis of targeted engagement with a number of relevant stakeholders. We will seek to complete the review at pace, within 12 months. The Government look forward to working collaboratively with the BBC, Ofcom and the devolved Administrations throughout the course of the review.

Alongside the commencement of the mid-term review, the Government are also publishing a set of changes to the framework agreement with the BBC. The BBC has agreed a binding legal commitment to a number of ambitious reform proposals. The changes update the existing agreement to ensure it accurately reflects the BBC's plans to deliver the corporation's mission and public purposes for the remainder of the charter period. Changes include BBC workforce accessibility targets, increasing the proportion of BBC spend outside of London, and delivering impartiality and editorial standards reform as recommended by the Serota review. The amendments also require the BBC to report on its progress in its annual report and accounts, supporting Parliament and the public to hold the BBC to account on delivery.

Alongside this, I have also issued a direction to the BBC requiring it to promote equality of opportunity for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This aims to ensure the BBC becomes more accessible, and supports the career development and progression of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Progress against these commitments will be considered as part of the mid-term review where possible.

[HCWS67]

## Rugby League World Cup 2021: Contingent Liability

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston):** I wish to inform the House that, on 26 May 2022, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport laid a departmental minute recording the Government's commitment to underwrite the rugby league world cup (rescheduled from 2021 to 15 October-9 November 2022).

As set out in the minute, this underwrite would cover up to £10 million, with £4 million ringfenced for increased costs due to covid-19, and £6 million ringfenced for lost ticketing income due to covid-19. The minute also sets out a number of scenarios in which the underwrite can be called upon. The national governing body, the Rugby Football League will be responsible for any other additional costs that exceed the event budget.

When bidding to secure this event in 2016, DCMS agreed to fund £15 million towards the tournament and a further £10 million towards legacy projects to help grow the game at grassroots level. A further £5.6 million was granted from the sport survival package when the tournament had to be postponed due to the pandemic. This underwrite will ensure that we can look forward to hosting a world cup as planned. It will also support delivery of an event that will drive economic growth in the region and deliver significant benefits against the Government's sporting and wider ambitions, including the levelling-up agenda.

The Government underwrite, therefore, creates a contingent liability for the Department in relation to this event of up to £10 million.

A copy of the departmental minute will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS70]

## Sale of Chelsea FC

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries):** I wish to inform the House that on 24 May the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI) issued a licence to Chelsea Football Club to allow the sale of Chelsea FC plc. This will allow ownership to be transferred away from Roman Abramovich, a designated person under the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. The club will be free from previous operating restrictions imposed by sanctions from the point the new ownership takes effect, and we expect this to take place in a matter of days.

Roman Abramovich was added to the list of individuals sanctioned by the UK Government on 10 March. This listing was made as part of wider Government policy to encourage Russia to cease actions destabilising Ukraine or undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty or independence of Ukraine.

The UK asset freeze prohibits anyone subject to UK jurisdiction from dealing with assets which are owned or controlled by Roman Abramovich and forbids persons from making funds or other assets available, directly or indirectly, to him. In time, this would have paralysed Chelsea FC. Without further action from the Government, the club could not have finished the season and would likely have gone into administration.

The Government recognise the importance of the club to the premier league, the football pyramid and the fans. That is why we issued a licence to allow football-related activities to continue on the same day Roman Abramovich was sanctioned. Our actions have deprived Mr Abramovich of any benefit from owning the club while allowing the men's and women's teams to complete their remaining fixtures for the season.

However, this was not a long-term solution and the Government have always been clear that the club should be sold before the end of the football season to secure its long-term future. Of course, this was conditional on our assurance that there could be no benefit to any sanctioned individual.

Chelsea FC identified its preferred owner, and after agreeing the conditions of the sale, it applied for a licence to transfer ownership. The Government has assessed the evidence the club has provided to support its application and we are satisfied that our conditions have been met and the integrity of the sanctions regime is maintained. OFSI has now issued a licence to enable a sale on that basis. We have worked in co-ordination with international partners to ensure that relevant licences from other jurisdictions have also been issued.

Now that the Government have issued the licence, we expect the ownership transfer to take place in the coming days subject to Roman Abramovich agreeing to the sale himself. The net proceeds from the sale will be transferred from the buyers to a frozen UK bank account belonging to Fordstam, the holding company owned by Mr Abramovich, which sold the club. Any onward transfer of money will require further approval from the Government.

Roman Abramovich has made a number of public statements regarding his intention to transfer the proceeds to the victims of the war in Ukraine. We have agreed a deed of undertaking in which he commits the proceeds to a charity in a jurisdiction agreed by the Government for the purposes of helping victims of the war in Ukraine. Any future movement of the sale revenue will be assessed in line with sanctions obligations and the position outlined in the deed. It will be up to the Government to decide whether to license any movement of funds from the frozen account.

A quick sale which respects the integrity of the sanctions regime has always been in the best interests of the Government, the club and the wider football community. This licence will secure the future of this important cultural asset and deliver for the fans while ensuring Roman Abramovich will not benefit.

[HCWS71]

## EDUCATION

### Child Protection

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** Today, the independent national child safeguarding practice review panel published its national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.

The murders of Arthur and Star shocked the nation. It is incomprehensible that anyone could harm a child in this way.

I want to thank Annie Hudson, the chair of the panel, and her team for their hard work and commitment in setting out the learning from these horrific incidents. Arthur and Star's extended families did as much as they could to protect them. Being involved in this process and reflecting on what happened must have been incredibly difficult. I want to thank the children's families for their contributions to today's review and the insights they have provided while grieving for their huge loss. I am also grateful to professionals across Bradford and Solihull for their engagement with the review. It is only through these open and honest conversations that we can truly learn from what has happened.

No Government can legislate for evil, but the panel's recommendations look to address the problems that they have seen across child protection services, and to make such terrible incidents as rare as possible.

The national review pays tribute to the many professionals across our country who carry out effective child protection every day, whilst recognising that the child protection system needs to be strengthened. To this end, the panel has made local recommendations for safeguarding partners in Solihull and Bradford as well as eight national recommendations to strengthen delivery of child protection services.

I am committed, with colleagues across this House, to acting on these recommendations. No time can be wasted in learning from these tragedies, and I assure the House that we will do all we can to deliver significant improvements to child protection services.

We have already taken strong action in both Solihull and Bradford to drive up the quality of services. In Solihull, I commissioned a joint targeted area inspection, served an improvement notice, provided additional funding, and deployed an expert improvement adviser. Alongside this, the local authority has established an improvement board to drive progress and ensure multi-agency working between the police, health and the local authority to keep local children as safe as possible.

In Bradford, we are establishing a new children's services trust. Evidence shows trusts can turn around failing services, delivering the care that every child deserves. This approach has worked well elsewhere, notably in Sunderland which improved from inadequate to outstanding in three years. Today I am delighted to announce the appointment of Eileen Milner as the chair of the new trust. Eileen is an experienced leader with a strong track record and will be working alongside our commissioner in Bradford, Steve Walker, and the council, to improve these critical services for children and families in Bradford as quickly as possible.

My Department's broader investment in local authority intervention and improvement is already paying off: 53% of authorities are now rated good or outstanding, up from 36% five years ago. 42% more children in need are now living in local authorities which are rated good or outstanding than in 2017.

Yet system change on a national scale is needed. On Monday, we announced the publication of the independent review of children's social care, led by Josh MacAlister. The recommendations align with those outlined in the independent review into children's social care and look to address the problems that they have seen across child protection services and make such terrible incidents as rare as possible.

As the panel's national review states, data and information sharing are essential to keeping children safe, and sadly weaknesses in information sharing hindered professionals' understanding of what was happening to Arthur and Star. This is why we will take action to drive forward, from the independent review of children's social care, three data and digital priority areas, ensuring local government and partners are in the driving seat of reform. Following the review's recommendation for a data and technology taskforce, we will introduce a new digital and data solutions fund to help local authorities improve delivery for children and families through technology. More detail will follow later this year on joining up data from across the public sector so that we can increase transparency—both between safeguarding partners and the wider public.

My ministerial colleagues and I are fully committed to improving the national co-ordination of child protection. Today we have written to all safeguarding partners to emphasise the important messages contained in the national review and put out a call to action to take forward these important recommendations. Together with my colleagues across Whitehall, we will also form a new child protection ministerial group, to ensure that safeguarding is championed at the very highest levels. We are also developing further our offer of support to safeguarding partners and will clarify roles and responsibilities through guidance.

This is challenging and complex work, and I am sure colleagues across the House will agree with me that the vast majority of those working in child protection go to work each day to try to make things better. No one deserves to be the subject of abuse and harassment, let alone such conscientious, committed and capable professionals doing all they can to protect children from harm.

I will consider the recommendations from the panel's national review and those from the independent review of children's social care and respond in full before the end of this year when we will publish a bold implementation strategy incorporating the recommendations.

I am committed to driving forward progress with those across all safeguarding agencies to protect children, and with colleagues across Parliament as well as those with lived experience of the care system, to deliver reform.

I know that people in Solihull, Bradford and far beyond are deeply troubled by the findings of these reviews. I want to assure people across the country that this Government will not shirk our duty of keeping children safe, that the lines written in these reviews will be poured over, and steps will be taken to make sure lessons are learned so that we do not find ourselves here again.

[HCWS64]

## National Tutoring Programme

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):** This update presents the latest performance data for the national tutoring programme that the Government have published today.

On 31 March, I announced that almost 1.2 million courses had been started by pupils through the programme since its inception in November 2020. I am now pleased



to advise the House that our latest estimates show that, up to 8 May, 1.5 million courses have now started. This represents solid progress towards the Government's ambitious target of delivering up to 6 million courses by the end of the academic year 2023-24. 900,000 of the 1.2 million courses started this year are being delivered through the school-led option by schools using grant funding directly allocated to them.

On 31 March, we also announced that from the next academic year we would allocate all funding for tutoring directly to schools. Procurement is currently under way for three new contracts to support schools to engage well-trained, high-quality tutors. The delivery partner(s) who will be selected through three open, competitive exercises will be responsible for quality assurance, offering training and recruiting, and deploying academic mentors. The procurement closed on 23 May. We will communicate full details of next year's programme to schools in June and we will announce the successful applicant(s) in mid-July, so that delivery can commence at speed from the start of September. I will update the House on the successful applications in a future written ministerial statement.

[HCWS10]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Child Citizenship Registration Fees

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster):** Today I am laying before the House an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Regulations 2018, which includes changes in respect of applications made by children seeking to register as British citizens.

Since 2018, the Home Office has charged a fee of £1,012 to those under the age of 18 who are seeking to register as British citizens under the provisions of the British Nationality Act 1981 (BNA). This fee has been set in line with Section 68(9) of the Immigration Act 2014, which details the factors the Home Secretary may take into account when setting fees. These include the costs of processing an application, the benefits that are likely to accrue to any person in connection with the application, and the costs of exercising wider immigration and nationality functions.

In keeping with the requirements of this legislative framework, the Department has pursued an approach over the last decade of progressively increasing the role fees play in funding the borders and migration system. This self-funding model serves to ensure those who benefit from the system contribute to its effective operation and maintenance, while reducing reliance on taxpayer funding. This in turn helps to ensure the system is able to support the Home Office's priority outcomes, including enabling the legitimate movement of people and goods to support economic prosperity, and tackling illegal migration, removing those with no right to be here and protecting the vulnerable.

However, as Section 71 of the Immigration Act 2014 makes clear, this does not limit the Secretary of State's duty under Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act (BCIA) 2009 to make arrangements to ensure immigration

and nationality functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK. On 18 February 2021, the Court of Appeal, following a case brought by the Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens (PRCBC), found that the Secretary of State had breached that duty in setting the fee in Regulations in 2017 and 2018. The Home Secretary accepted the court's findings and committed to reviewing the fee in line with her duties under Section 55 of the BCIA 2009.

On 2 February 22 the Supreme Court handed down its judgment on an appeal made by PRCBC in relation to the status of the 2017 and 2018 Regulations that set the fee charged to children to register as British citizens, which held that the regulations were not "ultra vires" and the principles that underpin our fees system had been lawfully applied. Following the Supreme Court's judgment, the Home Secretary was able to conclude her review of the fee and has decided, as a result, to introduce changes in relation to child citizenship fees in order to better facilitate access to citizenship for children who may face difficulties in paying the fee. The changes are the introduction of a fee waiver for child citizenship applications on the basis of affordability, and a fee exception for children who are looked after by a local authority. In parallel, the Home Secretary has also decided to maintain the £1,012 fee at its current level, reflecting the substantial number of applications that the Department does receive under the current fees regime and the critical role income from these applications plays in supporting the sustainable funding of a borders and migration system that is critical to delivery of the Home Office's key objectives.

By introducing the affordability based waiver, our aim is to ensure the fee does not serve as a significant practical barrier to the acquisition of British citizenship for children who are eligible to apply, where the unaffordability of that fee can be demonstrated. This recognises the particular value British citizenship can have for children who have been born in or spent a substantial part of their lives in the UK, particularly those intangible benefits in terms of the sense of identity and belonging which develop during an individual's formative years, and the impact this can have on their wider wellbeing. At the same time, it reflects our belief that a waiver offers the most effective means of facilitating applications from children for whom affordability of the fee does represent a practical barrier, while balancing against the wider financial impact on the Department, relative to other options. In addition, the specific fee exception that is being introduced will serve to relieve an administrative and financial burden from local authorities, while enabling the Department to work more proactively with them to register children who are eligible and where it is in their best interests.

Further details on how to apply for the waiver and exception will be set out in published guidance, with applications open from 16 June. I hope colleagues will join me in welcoming these changes, which I believe represent a positive step in responding to the concerns raised by members of this House as well as other stakeholders in relation to children's access to British citizenship.

[HCWS65]

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### Prime Minister's Trade Envoy Programme

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mike Freer):** The Prime Minister has today made three new appointments to his trade envoy programme. The appointments are:

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller) has been appointed as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Canada

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (John Whittingdale) has been appointed as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to the Republic of Korea

The right hon. Lord Hutton of Furness (John Hutton) has been appointed as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Turkey.

The new appointments will extend the total number of trade envoys to 40 parliamentarians, covering 80 markets. The role as a Prime Minister's trade envoy is unpaid and voluntary with cross-party membership from both Houses. The broad role supports the UK's ambitious trade and investment agenda by championing Global Britain and promoting the UK as a destination of choice for inward investment. They also support the UK's economic recovery through the levelling up agenda, by helping business take advantage of the opportunities arising in export markets.

[HCWS57]

## TRANSPORT

### Strategic Framework for Aviation

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts):** The Government have today published "Flightpath to the Future"—a strategic framework for the future of aviation, focusing on the next 10 years.

This strategic framework highlights Government's continued commitment to the sustainable growth of the aviation sector, recognising the vital importance of aviation to the UK. From supporting economic growth to creating jobs across the UK, aviation adds huge value to our nation. It also has an essential role to play in the personal value it provides to individuals and businesses, providing connections all around the world.

The aviation sector has faced unprecedented challenges during the covid-19 pandemic, and recovery is an essential part of our plan for the future. In March the UK became the first major economy in the world to remove all covid-19-related travel measures and restrictions for all passengers entering the UK. This is a really important milestone and marks a turning point for aviation in our journey back to pre-pandemic normality.

The publication of "Flightpath to the Future" recognises the importance of looking ahead for aviation. It takes into account the importance of supporting sector recovery, while also recognising the range of opportunities and challenges facing aviation over the medium term. From making the most of Brexit and trade opportunities to embracing new technologies and decarbonising the sector, the next 10 years will play a defining role in the future of UK aviation.

"Flightpath to the Future" sets out the Government's key priorities, including a 10-point plan for delivery. The 10-point plan focuses on how we can achieve our ambition of creating a modern, innovative and efficient

sector that is fit for the future. The Government are committed to working closely with the aviation sector to build back better and greener than ever before, with an ambition of retaining our position as one of the strongest aviation sectors in the world.

An essential aspect of this will be close engagement between the Government and the sector, building on positive engagement that has been fundamental during the pandemic. Alongside publishing the "Flightpath to the Future", the Government are therefore also launching an Aviation Council, focused on supporting the implementation of the commitments established through this strategic framework. The council will be jointly chaired by the Minister for Aviation and an industry representative, and will include representatives from across the whole sector, a range of Government Departments and the devolved Administrations.

Our 10-point plan for the future of UK aviation covers the following areas:

#### *Enhancing global impact for sustainable recovery*

1. Recover, learn lessons from the pandemic and sustainably grow the sector
2. Enhance the UK's global aviation impact and leadership
3. Support growth in airport capacity where it is justified, ensuring that capacity is used in a way that delivers for the UK

#### *Embracing innovation for a sustainable future*

4. Put the sector on course to achieve jet zero by 2050
5. Capture the potential of new technology and its uses

#### *Realising benefits for the UK*

6. Unlock local benefits and level up
7. Unleash the potential of the next generation of aviation professionals
8. Make the UK the best place in the world for general aviation

#### *Delivering for users*

9. Improve the consumer experience
10. Retain our world-leading record on security and safety with a world-leading regulator

Implementing the 10-point plan will play an important role in meeting Government and sector ambitions for the future of aviation. The Government recognise that the sector is currently in the early stages of recovery, and there are a number of challenges ahead. We will work hand in hand with the whole aviation sector to implement the commitments set out in the flightpath and ensure a bright future for UK aviation.

We have a real opportunity not only to see passenger demand return, and the sector flourish again, but to modernise and create a greener, more sustainable sector for the future—a sector that leads the way internationally on key issues, be that learning lessons from the pandemic, delivering jet zero or embracing the opportunities presented by aviation innovation. The UK will continue to have one of the strongest aviation sectors internationally, including always putting consumers first, and having the safest and most secure sector in the world.

I have deposited copies of "Flightpath to the Future" in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS63]

## Maritime and Coastguard Agency Business Plans

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts):** I am proud to announce the publication of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) business plan for 2022-23. The MCA does vital work to save lives at sea, regulate ship standards and protect the marine environment. The agency will be playing its part in encouraging and enabling the industry to move towards zero carbon emissions from shipping and to prepare the way to regulate the safety of autonomous shipping.

The business plan sets out how the agency will:

- build on its success as one of the world's best performing flag and coastal states, with a modern and progressive approach to how it regulates;
- promote the unlocking of sustainable growth in the maritime economy through support for the new shipping concierge service; and
- continue the provision of its high-quality search and rescue capability, as well as the survey and inspection of ships.

At international level, the MCA will work alongside other Government Departments to represent the UK's interests at the International Maritime Organisation.

The work of the MCA will contribute to the success of the Department for Transport's Maritime 2050 strategy and its transport decarbonisation plan.

The business plan will be available on gov.uk and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS61]

## Union Connectivity Review: Update

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):** The UK Government are grateful to Sir Peter Hendy for his Union connectivity review. We are considering his recommendations carefully, and have been working with the Scottish Government, Welsh Government, Northern Ireland Executive and key stakeholders, to identify the solutions that work best for the people of the UK. We expect to publish the UK Government's response later this year.

Several of the Union connectivity review recommendations concern ongoing projects, which may be impacted by the Union connectivity review response. The A1 Morpeth to Ellingham scheme is one such case, as it relates to Sir Peter's recommendation for a multimodal study of the east coast corridor to identify the best opportunities for improvement. We therefore propose to consider how best to align the future progression of the scheme with our consideration of this recommendation and the outcome of any study that may be proposed.

[HCWS62]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Fraud and Error National Statistics

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (David Rutley):** The statistics for fraud and error in the benefit system, for the financial year ending 2022, were published on Thursday 26 May 2022 at 9.30 am. The figures published today confirm the overall rate of fraud and error in 2021-22 was 4.0%, or £8.6 billion. This includes a rate of fraudulent overpayments at 3.0%—£6.5 billion—and a rate of claimant error at 0.7%—£1.5 billion—both of which represent a small but not statistically significant increase. We successfully reduced official error, which has dropped to 0.3%—£0.7 billion. This outcome largely reflects the ongoing situation of covid where some unscrupulous people, including sophisticated organised crime groups, exploited easements we had made to prioritise payments to those who needed help.

We have always been clear that it would take time to root out this fraud. As we said last summer, our expectation for these fraud and error results was that they would be broadly similar to last year as the caseload still contained many cases from the early days of the pandemic. This is still the case. Overall though, we have successfully contained fraud in UC at a time when fraud in society has been increasing, but there is more to do.

That is why we are taking action. Last week, we published our ambitious plan, "Fighting Fraud in the Welfare System" to prevent, deter and detect fraudsters and protect taxpayers' money.

The plan sets out how we will deploy 1,400 more staff in our counter-fraud teams, establish a new 2,000-strong team dedicated to reviewing existing universal credit claims and develop an enhanced data analytics package to prevent and detect fraud. These initiatives are possible thanks to a three-year additional investment of £613 million, which we estimate will stop £2.1 billion of loss in fraud and error over the next three years. The plan also sets out our intention to bring forward new powers, when parliamentary time allows, to investigate potential fraud and punish fraudsters.

Today's release also includes data on the state pension. The overpayment rate for state pension was 0.1%, the total underpayment rate was 0.5%. This includes very small value uprating errors, the vast majority being 1p or 2p a week. These small errors are the result of an historical issue first identified several decades ago and which has now been recorded in these statistics for the first time. Additionally, a small number of state pension errors have also been identified relating to incorrect national insurance records which are administered by HMRC. DWP is supporting HMRC's investigations into whether these are isolated cases. We will provide a further update when we have more information.

[HCWS72]







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