

**Wednesday  
22 June 2022**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 22 June 2022**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 22 June 2022*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### NORTHERN IRELAND

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Trade between NI and rest of UK

1. **Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support businesses trading between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

[900559]

9. **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support businesses trading between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

[900567]

10. **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support businesses trading between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

[900568]

12. **Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support businesses trading between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

[900571]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis):** Mr Speaker, I thank you and the team at the Houses of Parliament for the unveiling this morning of the plaque recognising Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson.

We cannot allow the Northern Ireland protocol to continue to prevent the free movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which is why we have introduced legislation that will allow businesses to trade freely again. We are providing reassurance for business by continuing to operate the standstill arrangements, and we will work with businesses on the details of any new models.

**Nick Fletcher:** Does the Secretary of State agree that trade between our Union is of the utmost importance and that we should do all we can in this place to make sure it is not hindered in any way?

**Brandon Lewis:** Absolutely—the Government are steadfastly committed to Northern Ireland's integral place in the United Kingdom. We will never be neutral on the Union. The proposed legislation we recently introduced will fix the practical problems the protocol has created in Northern Ireland, avoiding a hard border, protecting the integrity of the UK and safeguarding the EU single market.

**Dr James Davies:** Businesses based in Great Britain, such as the Snowdonia Cheese Company in my constituency, tell me that while it is possible for them to trade with Northern Ireland, doing so can be very involved, costly and restrictive. The current application of the Northern Ireland protocol is therefore hampering business growth and success. Will my right hon. Friend confirm how businesses like Snowdonia Cheese stand to benefit from the provisions in the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend makes an important point on why the Bill matters. Freedom to move products within the UK's internal market without impediment is critical. The proposed legislation will enable businesses to trade freely once again by delivering new green and red lane arrangements. It will remove unnecessary costs and work for businesses trading within the UK, while ensuring the necessary checks are done, quite properly, for goods entering the EU.

**Alexander Stafford:** Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government will continue to work closely with businesses to ensure that we address all their needs, so that trade with Northern Ireland and Rother Valley boom?

**Brandon Lewis:** Absolutely. My hon. Friend is right. We want to see trade booming across the United Kingdom and for the United Kingdom. We will continue to work closely with businesses. The purpose of the secondary legislative powers in the Bill is to allow us to flesh out precise technical details in our proposals, working with business, who we will always engage with, to ensure that our solutions work and deliver for them and for the people of Northern Ireland. We will be doing that with them, as well as with other stakeholders, both in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, over the next months to ensure that the new systems address their needs.

**Caroline Ansell:** As my right hon. Friend says, there are huge opportunities for trade within the Union, including with spaceports in Cornwall and Scotland. Given Northern Ireland's expertise and strength in the manufacture of spacecraft components, can my right hon. Friend assure me that when it comes to procurement, businesses in Northern Ireland are as well placed as any to bid for these—I cannot resist this—stellar opportunities?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend is always fired on rocket-powered fuel when asking direct questions like that—and I am afraid that, no, I cannot top that.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Northern Ireland has real expertise in advanced engineering, manufacturing and aerospace. It is right that we take measures, in taking the Bill through, to ensure that businesses across the United Kingdom—and yes, from my point of view, obviously, predominantly those businesses in Northern Ireland—can absolutely benefit from the opportunities that are there for the UK, bringing UK businesses together in a global way that can see their business grow and create more jobs.

**Claire Hanna** (Belfast South) (SDLP): The Government claim that their protocol Bill is designed to protect the Good Friday agreement, while being in the middle of a demolition derby of its core values, creating regression and polarisation that will take us years to fix. The

Secretary of State should know that the Human Rights Act is a cornerstone commitment of the Good Friday agreement. What legal advice has he received and what representations has he made to Cabinet colleagues about the compatibility of the Bill of Rights and the 1998 agreement that he is charged with protecting?

**Brandon Lewis:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. It is important that we deliver and protect all aspects of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement; I have made the point several times at the Dispatch Box over the past couple of years that we have to ensure that we protect all three strands, not just one. I am pleased that the hon. Lady recently said:

“I do not love the protocol”.—[*Official Report*, 15 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 374WH.]

There is no doubt that there are a lot of challenges for businesses, so I hope that she will support the Bill, which seeks to fix those challenges.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The latest business to report disruption to its supply is a photo-framing business in Newtownards whose supplier has said that the profit margin is not worth the hassle of sending its order, so it has been cancelled. That is another of the 200 companies that trade between England and Northern Ireland; the tale is repeated for businesses in every postcode. The Government must do the right thing and restore our position, not just constitutionally but financially for businesses. Will the Secretary of State give a date for the withdrawal Bill's Second Reading?

**Brandon Lewis:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot confirm the exact date at this point, but we have introduced the Bill and he can be reassured that the Government are committed to resolving the problems with the protocol, restoring the primacy of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and restoring sovereignty and territorial integrity for the whole United Kingdom. It is imperative that we ensure that people in Northern Ireland have the same benefits, laws and courts as everybody everywhere else in the United Kingdom. I have been very clear that, as part of that, we want to ensure that we deliver strand 1, which means the reformation of the Northern Ireland Executive as soon as possible.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Even a fool now knows that Brexit has damaged UK trade and GDP, but do the Government have any assessment of the GDP gain and the benefit to business that the protocol has given Northern Ireland, especially as it is the only part of the UK outside London to record growth, and the only part of the UK inside the single market? It is no coincidence that it has seen growth.

**Brandon Lewis:** I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman does a bit of research, he will see that it is actually quite a complicated picture. It is good to see Northern Ireland growing back quickly: with a larger proportion of the economy in Northern Ireland based on the public sector, and with the phenomenal support that the Chancellor has put in, that is to be welcomed. We want to see Northern Ireland's economy growing; it was struggling before covid. We are making sure to put that support in, but I have to say that that would be even easier were it

not for the protocol, which is preventing some of the Chancellor's measures from benefiting the people of Northern Ireland.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Given that so much policy that affects and benefits business is devolved, is not the best support that politicians of all stripes could give Northern Irish business to get Stormont back up and running?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We all want to see Stormont back up and running. It is important that we see all the Ministers back with their full powers. We have caretaker Ministers in place now, thanks to legislation that we passed recently, but having Stormont making spending decisions, getting money out the door and supporting businesses and people in Northern Ireland is the right thing to do.

### Northern Ireland Protocol Negotiations

2. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on progress in the Northern Ireland protocol negotiations. [900560]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis):** I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues about issues affecting Northern Ireland more widely, including the Northern Ireland protocol.

**Justin Madders:** The Secretary of State will be aware that the Northern Ireland Business Brexit Working Group, which represents 14 industries, released a statement last week stating that

“there are significant concerns about the introduction of an all-encompassing dual regulatory regime.”

I understand that dairy farmers have similar concerns. Having heard about those issues, can the Secretary of State tell us what consultation the Government did with businesses before introducing this regime?

**Brandon Lewis:** We are in continual engagement with business. We have had more than two meetings a month with the wider group, and the Minister of State and I have made more than 30 visits to businesses that are members of those groups. We are in constant communication with business. It is important that we design the details in conjunction with business to ensure that businesses that are doing well and sectors such as dairy that benefit from the economy across the island of Ireland do not lose out. We must also ensure that we deliver for the businesses that are so detrimentally affected by the problems with the EU's implementation of the protocol.

**Craig Williams** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): The EU is rightfully focused on protecting its own single market, but may I respectfully request that we first and foremost protect the single market of the United Kingdom? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the practical and durable solution set out in the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill will do just that?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend is spot on, as ever. Our legislation will restore the balance inherent in the objectives of the protocol, avoiding a hard border, protecting the integrity of the United Kingdom and safeguarding the EU single market. It is right that we are doing the right thing by the businesses and citizens of Northern Ireland, who are businesses and citizens of the United Kingdom and the UK internal market.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Secretary of State, Peter Kyle.

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** When the Government introduced the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, the Secretary of State was quite honest about his lawbreaking, and here we are again. The man who resigned over his actions, the former head of the Government Legal Department, says that the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill is “next-level” lawbreaking. Based on this Government’s track record, why should anyone believe what the Minister claims about this Bill’s legality?

**Brandon Lewis:** The hon. Gentleman tends to make a habit of standing at the Dispatch Box and taking the side of the EU over the UK, which is disappointing: what he should be doing is supporting the UK economy and supporting businesses and people in Northern Ireland, who want to see a resolution. We have set out a package in this legislation that is within the law and delivers for the people of Northern Ireland by delivering on what should be the priority for all of us: the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, in all three strands.

**Peter Kyle:** The Secretary of State mentions the Good Friday/Belfast agreement, but the Foreign Secretary argues for unilateral action on the protocol because it does not have the necessary support in one of the communities in Northern Ireland. I say that the EU must show more flexibility and listen to the Unionist concerns, but if cross-community support is so important to the Government, can he confirm that the current plans also have the support of the nationalist community?

**Brandon Lewis:** The hon. Gentleman talks about the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, but his tweets in the last couple of weeks have highlighted that he has possibly not even read it; I suggest that he at least gets equipped with who the signatories to the agreement are, so that he understands who the co-guarantors are.

We are focused on delivering all three strands of the agreement. One thing that has been common and clear from the leaders of all the parties in Northern Ireland is that, in one form or another, they all—nationalists and Unionists—want to see changes to the Northern Ireland protocol. They all acknowledge that there are problems with it and that it is not working for businesses and citizens in Northern Ireland. Eventually, if we are not able to get an agreement with the EU, we will have to take forward measures to secure a resolution of the problems that all those people and businesses are outlining. We would rather do that by agreement with the EU, but it is right that we take action.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP):** The EU has threatened to remove access for Northern Ireland businesses to the single market. To police this, it would have to create a hard border on the island of Ireland;

that is the only consequence of its actions. Does the Secretary of State agree that such a threat from the EU indicates that, far from wanting to protect the Good Friday agreement and peace and stability in Northern Ireland, it simply wants to punish Northern Ireland businesses because the UK Government want to protect the UK internal market?

**Brandon Lewis:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. It is right that we are looking to deliver on all three strands of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. We will never be looking at any sort of infrastructure; there cannot be a hard border on the island, in the same way that there should not be a hard border between east and west. That is the issue of the three strands. We recognise that the EU’s focus is on its single market. We recognise that we will ensure that its single market is protected, but we will defend all three strands of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** The Secretary of State will be aware that the former Prime Minister Tony Blair has stated that the protocol presents a real risk to the Good Friday agreement. Does he agree that the agreement and the political institutions can operate only on the basis of cross-community consensus and not the majority rule that some in this House are now advocating? Does he also agree that in order to achieve that cross-community consensus, the Government need to proceed with legislation that will resolve the real difficulties that the protocol is presenting for the people of Northern Ireland and our place in the Union?

**Brandon Lewis:** Yes; the Government have been clear that we are determined that the political settlement in Northern Ireland is based on respect and understanding between all communities and the consent of those communities. The protocol is clearly undermining that, and that has to be resolved. That is what we are seeking to do through our legislation. We would like to get an agreement with the EU, but we need to move on and get this legislation in place as we have been unable to secure that agreement with the EU, in order to protect the internal market of the UK, the people and businesses of Northern Ireland and all three aspects of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement.

**Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con):** The Government invested a great deal of good faith in signing the protocol and they were entitled to expect the same good faith in return. It is now pretty clear that the protocol, in practice, has not proved to be compatible with the Good Friday agreement. Will the Government now consider triggering article 16, particularly given the casual, if fleeting, use of that measure by Ursula von der Leyen?

**Brandon Lewis:** My right hon. Friend makes an important point about how the EU has already triggered article 16, for example, to create disruption with the vaccine roll-out during covid, which highlighted how it views the north-south potential and the potential of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. We are determined to resolve the issues overall. As we have said previously, we do not want to trigger article 16. We take nothing off the table, but we are very clear that our proposed legislation resolves the issues that the protocol is creating and it is the right move to take.



### NI Protocol Bill: Discussions with the EU

**3. Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What recent discussions the Government has had with the EU on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill. [900561]

**4. Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What recent discussions the Government has had with the EU on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill. [900562]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis)**: Our preference remains to resolve the problems with the protocol through talks. Our door remains open to discussions, but the EU has so far not been willing to make meaningful changes to the protocol, which are necessary to deliver the solutions needed.

**Gavin Newlands**: I thank the Minister for that answer, but the Government walked away from negotiations. By rejecting negotiation in favour of lawbreaking and, in doing so, disregarding the wishes of the majority of MLAs, businesses and the Northern Irish public, the UK Government have utterly destroyed the trust that not only the EU had in the UK, but that Ireland and the United States had too. Trust is easily lost and hard won, so how do the Government plan to be seen as a good faith partner in international negotiations ever again?

**Brandon Lewis**: Last year, we published a Command Paper that set out solutions, with which the EU has never properly engaged. It did publish its ideas in October, which the business community in Northern Ireland said did not work. We have continually been in engagements and negotiations with the EU. It has been clear that it is not willing to show the flexibility needed to resolve the protocol issues, which is why we have introduced this Bill.

The hon. Gentleman might want to look back at *Hansard* to see the statement from the Foreign Secretary when we introduced the Bill. We are very clear, as I have said today, that we will continue to negotiate with the EU. We would like to seek a resolution by agreeing with the EU, but it is right that we table this legislation at this point as well to resolve the issues.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes**: Belfast harbour has reported levels of trade and increase in turnover of profits of 17% to £73.3 million from 2021, with pre-tax profits up 13% to £34 million. Can the Secretary of State advise the House why their Government would jeopardise 25.6 million tonnes of cargo, a 9% increase on the 23.5 million a year earlier, which was up by 5% on the previous record levels of 2019, by unilaterally changing the Northern Ireland protocol?

**Brandon Lewis**: The hon. Gentleman should read the full article, because then he would realise that, between the easements, the standstill and the grace periods, we are not actually fully implementing the protocol let alone the other business that Belfast harbour takes in that has nothing to do with the protocol. What we do know is that—

**Mr Speaker**: Order. Mr Docherty-Hughes, I think those whippets that you own need a little walk. That is where you will be going shortly.

**Brandon Lewis**: I will leave the hon. Gentleman to read the article, so that he can realise just how wrong his question was.

**Dr Neil Hudson** (Penrith and The Border) (Con): Many of the issues related to trade and movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland are plant and animal-related. What progress have the Government made in trying to secure an arrangement between the UK and the EU on veterinary and sanitary and phytosanitary matters? That would address these issues and also enhance the UK's biosecurity.

**Brandon Lewis**: My hon. Friend makes an important point. One frustration with this failure by the EU to see the flexibility that we need is that, by resolving some of these issues, we could have avoided the need for us to legislate and to take this period of time to resolve things. Our legislation will resolve all of these issues and create a method that not only protects the EU single market, but, importantly, works for businesses, works for citizens, and works for all three aspects of the Good Friday agreement, dealing with those very issues that he raises.

**Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con): One of my predecessors in Redcar was the political giant Dr Marjorie Mowlam, most notable for her work in securing the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. Can the Minister confirm that any arrangement we reach with the EU in relation to the protocol will take account of and address the issues that are disrupting the delicate balance of that agreement?

**Brandon Lewis**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is important that we respect the balance in that agreement. It is important because it has given us peace for 24 years, and that is where our focus is.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the SNP spokesperson.

**Richard Thomson** (Gordon) (SNP): I have to remind the Secretary of State that it was this Government who signed up to the trade and co-operation agreement and the Northern Ireland protocol as it currently stands. It might not be necessary to try to renegotiate had more time been given over to this Chamber to allow Members to scrutinise it before it entered into law. Does the Secretary of State regret the decision taken by the Government to curtail the amount of parliamentary time available to Members to scrutinise that before Brexit was done?

**Brandon Lewis**: I think the hon. Gentleman is arguing to go back in time and take even longer to get Brexit done. I am not sure the British public or anybody would thank him for that, but of course the business of the House is generally agreed through the usual channels; that is always the case.

### Cost of Living

**5. Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What steps the Government is taking to help reduce the cost of living in Northern Ireland. [900563]

6. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What steps the Government is taking to help reduce the cost of living in Northern Ireland. [900564]

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Conor Burns):** The challenges faced by the public across the United Kingdom in terms of the cost of living are the dominant issue facing British politics. The Government are acting decisively to ensure that we provide support to the most vulnerable households. The biggest thing we could do in Northern Ireland would be to restore devolved Government, so that we have a Government who can act for the people of Northern Ireland, as the Government of the United Kingdom are acting in England, Scotland and Wales.

**Liz Twist:** The Minister will be well aware that the energy price cap does not exist in Northern Ireland, leaving households vulnerable to the price hikes of up to 33% we have seen in recent months. The Treasury said in May that it was urgently working to step in to provide direct support due to the lack of an Executive. Can the Government now lay out how the £400 energy discount will be delivered in Northern Ireland?

**Conor Burns:** We are very clear on this. The way that it should be delivered is through restored devolved Government in Northern Ireland, and the impediment to that, as the hon. Lady will know, is the interpretation and application of the Northern Ireland protocol. As I have said clearly to Members from the Democratic Unionist party, that is a matter for the United Kingdom to negotiate with the European Union, or we can take legislative measures in this House, as we are doing. They should be back in Government delivering for the people of Northern Ireland on the mandate delivered in May.

**Chris Elmore:** An Ulster Bank report last week contained the worrying result that Northern Irish firms are the least optimistic of any firms in a UK nation or region about activity in 12 months' time. What further support can the Government offer to businesses in Northern Ireland that are struggling with this Tory cost of living crisis?

**Conor Burns:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, this is an international challenge that has been exacerbated by the situation in Ukraine and Russia, and the Government are delivering decisive action and interventions to help people through this incredibly challenging situation—probably the most challenging situation that we have faced for a generation. In Northern Ireland, we have New Decade, New Approach funding, city and growth deals, the levelling-up agenda and the community shared ownership funding. We are making a plethora of interventions in Northern Ireland to make life for ordinary people better than it is already.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I have listened to one of the most able members of the Government and his thoughtful response. If the problem really is the Northern Ireland protocol, how on earth are we going to get the EU to see sense?

**Conor Burns:** My hon. Friend asks some of the most devastating supplementary questions. We are very straightforward on this: we are simply saying to the European Union—I have been explaining this on behalf

of the Prime Minister in the United States—that goods that are moving within the United Kingdom's internal market and destined for sale and consumption in Northern Ireland, and that will never see dawn or dusk in the Irish Republic, pose absolutely no risk whatsoever to the integrity of the European single market. I spent time two weeks ago with Tony Blair, who has produced an amazing report that says that the European Union needs to find the room to move. Vice-President Šefčovič needs to be given a broader mandate. I say to my hon. Friend that it absolutely remains the determination of the Government to reach a conclusion on the protocol in negotiation, friendship and partnership with the European Union.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Because of the Barnett formula—something that the SNP would do away with for Scotland—our whole United Kingdom, including Scotland and Northern Ireland, will benefit from the £81 billion household support fund, including £14 million for Northern Ireland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this will help the most vulnerable households in Northern Ireland?

**Conor Burns:** As almost always, my hon. Friend is absolutely right.

**Mr Speaker:** I call shadow Minister Tonia Antoniazzi.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Last week, I met Jonny Petrie, chief executive of Ulster Rugby, about the club's plans to apply for levelling-up funding to improve sporting facilities, including for community clubs across Northern Ireland, that would support the health and wellbeing of local people. Will the Government commit to considering funding development of these facilities so that Northern Ireland can attract major sporting and cultural events that would deliver much-needed tourism, jobs and money to the people of Northern Ireland?

**Conor Burns:** I am delighted—[*Interruption.*] Thank you for that thunderous welcome back to the Dispatch Box. I am happy to say to the shadow Minister that we will absolutely do that. Only yesterday I was in Carrickfergus with the son-in-law of an hon. Gentleman on the Benches opposite seeing a new 5G pitch. We are absolutely committed to levelling up. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, levelling up is the mission of this Government. It is not about north-south; it is about improving life opportunities in communities across the whole of the United Kingdom, especially in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Speaker:** That must be the loudest cheer any Minister has had—well done, Minister!

Before we come to Prime Minister's questions, I would like to point out that British Sign Language interpretation of proceedings is available to watch on [parliamentlive.tv](https://parliamentlive.tv).

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [900644] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 22 June.

**The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson):** To mark Windrush Day, today sees the unveiling of a national monument at Waterloo station that acknowledges the Windrush generation's outstanding contribution to British society and will also be a permanent place of reflection.

As part of Armed Forces Week, I was delighted to host a reception yesterday in Downing Street. Members across the House are immensely proud of our armed forces and we thank them and their families for their service to our country.

I know the House will welcome the deal that we have signed with Moderna, which will see it build new facilities in the UK, including around £1 billion of new investment in research and development.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall have further such meetings later today. I will be travelling thereafter to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Rwanda, and I will then be attending the G7 leaders summit and the NATO summit, Mr Speaker, so a full budget of news for you there.

**Chris Elmore:** May I associate myself with the Prime Minister's comments in relation to the armed forces and other comments?

Has the Prime Minister ever considered the appointment of his current spouse to a Government post or to any organisation in one of the royal households? Be honest, Prime Minister—yes or no?

**The Prime Minister:** I know why Labour Members want to talk about non-existent jobs in the media—because they do not want to talk about what is going on in the real world. I am proud to say that we now have 620,000 more people in payroll employment than before the pandemic began, which would never have been possible if we had listened to the Leader of the Opposition.

Q2. [900645] **Julie Marson** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): The UK is the global leader in social outcomes contracts, which can deliver public services in an array of areas, from healthcare to mental healthcare, employment, education and development aid. According to Big Society Capital, every £1 the Government have spent in this way has delivered £10 in further economic, social and fiscal value, including £3 in direct savings to Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the time is right for the Government to redouble their focus on this outcomes-led commissioning?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to champion this type of approach, which makes a real difference to people's lives and people suffering from mental health issues, helping them to find a route back into work. That is why we are commissioning more initiatives through funds such as the life chances fund, helping those people in society who face the biggest barriers to have happy and productive lives.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the Leader of the Opposition, Keir Starmer.

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Can I join the Prime Minister in his comments about Windrush, and pay tribute to everyone who is serving and has served in our armed forces? Can I also pay tribute to everyone standing for election tomorrow and in particular the plucky Conservative candidate for Wakefield? He is

standing, even though his own colleagues think he is so useless that they held a vote of no confidence in him. Does the Prime Minister hold any personal interest in seeing if the public will vote for a Tory who even his own side do not think is up to it?

**The Prime Minister:** I have absolutely no doubt that the people of this country, and the people of Wakefield and of Tiverton and Honiton, would much rather vote for a solid Conservative Government than a Labour party and its enablers and acolytes in the Liberal Democrats—the karma chameleons of British politics—when the leader of the Labour party has not even got the gumption to speak out against the rail strikes that have caused so much damage to the people in the north of this country and up and down the country. There is unbelievable silence from the leader of the Labour party.

**Keir Starmer:** The Prime Minister has obviously not been to Wakefield recently. He has crashed the economy and he has put everybody's tax up. The last Tory he sent up to Wakefield was convicted of a sexual assault. That is not much of a pitch, Prime Minister. Talking of people not up to the job, while the Transport Secretary spends his time working on his spreadsheet tracking the Prime Minister's unpopularity, thousands of families have had their holiday flights cancelled, it takes forever to renew a driving licence or passport and now we have the biggest rail strike in 30 years. If the Prime Minister is genuine—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Both sides, let us calm down. We have only just started. The problem is, it will go on forever, and nobody wants that, I assure you, whoever is speaking or asking questions.

**Keir Starmer:** If the Prime Minister is genuine about preventing strikes, will he tell this House how many meetings he or his Transport Secretary have had with rail workers this week to actually stop the strikes?

**The Prime Minister:** This is the Government who love the railways and who invest in the railways. We are putting £96 billion into the integrated railway plan. I am proud to have built Crossrail, by the way, and we are going to build Northern Powerhouse Rail, but we have got to modernise our railways. It is a disgrace, when we are planning to make sure that we do not have ticket offices that sell fewer than one ticket every hour, that yesterday the right hon. and learned Gentleman had 25 Labour MPs out on the picket line, defying instructions—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I want to hear the Prime Minister's answer, even if some Members do not. I think they ought to show some respect to the Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister:** There were 25 Labour MPs and the shadow deputy leader out on the picket line, backing the strikers, while we back the strivers.

**Keir Starmer:** I am surprised the Prime Minister is giving me advice about my team. If I do need advice, let us say, about a £100,000 job at the Foreign Office, I will ask him for a recommendation.



There you have it, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister of this country and his Transport Secretary have not attended a single meeting, held a conversation or lifted a finger to stop these strikes. But I did note that on Monday they found time to go to a lavish ball, where the Prime Minister sold a meeting with himself for £120,000 to a donor. If there is money coming his way, he is there. When it comes to the country, he is nowhere to be seen. Rather than blame everyone else, why does he not do his job, get round the table and get the trains running?

**The Prime Minister:** We are making sure that we do everything we can to prevent these strikes. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, it is up to the railway companies to negotiate—that is their job. We spent £16 billion looking after the railways throughout the pandemic. That has cost every household £600. We know why he takes the line he does; we know why he will not condemn the strikes; and we know why, even now, he does not have the gumption to call out his MPs who are going out to support the pickets. The reason his authority is on the line in this matter is that the Opposition take £10 million from the unions. That is the fee that he is receiving for the case he is failing to make.

**Keir Starmer:** The Prime Minister cannot help himself. There is a huge problem facing the country, and all he is interested in doing is blaming everyone else. Can he not hear the country screaming at him, “Get on with your job!”? While he blames everyone and anyone, working people are paying the price. This week, his Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that there is a “society-wide responsibility” for people to take a pay cut. At the same time, his chief of staff, the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay), is trying to change the law to get bankers’ bonuses increased. So come one, only one of them can be right: is it his Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who says that every worker needs a pay cut, or is it his chief of staff, who says that every banker needs a pay rise?

**The Prime Minister:** Actually, under this Government, 5 million public sector workers are getting a pay rise. We have increased the living wage by £1,000 and we have increased universal credit so that people get £1,000 more. Thanks to the fiscal firepower that we have, we are putting £1,200 more into every one of the 8 million most vulnerable households in the country. That is what we can do because of the tough decisions that we have taken. But meantime, what we are also trying to do is cut the cost of transport, which is a big part of people’s weekly outgoings, by reforming our railways. That is what we are trying to do, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman is standing with the strikers and lifting the cost of transport for everybody. That is the reality.

**Keir Starmer:** The Prime Minister’s chief of staff says that removing the cap on bankers’ bonuses is “reflective of the new approach”.

Pay rises for city bankers, pay cuts for district nurses—that is the new approach. I did not see that on any leaflets in Wakefield. But this has not come from nowhere, because according to the *Financial Times*, on 7 June last year, the Prime Minister was directly lobbied for the cap to be lifted. Rather than help working people, he has rolled over on bankers’ bonuses, has he not?

**The Prime Minister:** What we are actually doing, thanks to the decisions we have taken, is putting more money into the pockets of people up and down the country—£1,200 more for the 8 million most vulnerable households. The reason we can do that is because we took the tough decisions necessary to come out of the pandemic faster than any other European country. That is why we have unemployment at or near record lows. None of that would have been possible if we had listened to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. We have more people now in payrolled employment than we had before the pandemic began. That is what the British people know, and that is what this Government will continue to deliver.

**Keir Starmer:** Fifteen tax rises, high tax, low wages, low growth—that sums the Prime Minister’s Government up. Working people are paying more tax under this Government, and now they are told to take a pay cut. He is having meetings about increasing bankers’ bonuses, but he cannot find time for a single meeting to end the strikes crippling the country.

It is Armed Forces Week. Under this Prime Minister, those serving our country are facing a real-terms pay cut. Why are his Government more focused on increasing bankers’—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr MacNeil, your voice is not quiet—it is like mine; it carries. The best thing to do, if you want it to carry, is to try standing on the Terrace for a while.

**Keir Starmer:** It is Armed Forces Week. Under this Prime Minister, those serving our country are facing a real-terms pay cut. Why are his Government more focused on increasing bankers’ pay than the pay of those who are running the country?

**The Prime Minister:** How absolutely satirical that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should talk about our support for the armed forces when we have increased our funding for our armed forces by a record sum since the end of the cold war, and when eight of the shadow Front Bench team—eight of the shadow Front Bench—actually want to get rid of our nuclear deterrent, including the shadow Foreign Secretary. [*Interruption.*] Yes, it is true. We are helping people up and down the country: £1,200 will be coming into the bank accounts of the 8 million most vulnerable households. The cut in national insurance will be coming into their bank accounts as a result of the steps my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken. But what we are also doing is reforming our systems so that we cut costs for people up and down the country; reforming our energy markets, building a new nuclear reactor every year rather than one every 10 years; getting people off welfare into work—half a million people off welfare into work—because we have cut the time people are waiting on benefits; and cutting the costs of transport for working people by delivering reforms. We are doing that while they are out on the picket line, literally holding hands with Arthur Scargill. That’s them: it is worse than under Jeremy Corbyn. This is a Government who are taking this country forward; they would take it back to the 1970s.

Q4. [900648] **Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): For years in Harrogate and Knaresborough, we had the Labour no-growth Northern rail franchise. We now have new rolling stock, and more and better

services. We have, though, seen some lost as the industry has had to suspend some services while it catches up on driver training lost during the pandemic. Strikes just take us back to the 1970s, so will the Prime Minister's focus on the future ensure that we have apprenticeship schemes focusing on engineering and driver training to ensure that we recover the services lost, and that we have an industry that is focused on efficiency and embraces technology for the future?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend knows exactly of what he speaks, and we are doing just that. We are reforming train driver training to make entry into the sector simpler, while continuing, of course, to make sure that we meet vital safety requirements.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the parliamentary leader of the SNP.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour party as we mark Armed Services Week? We thank all our service personnel for the services that they give.

On Windrush Day, we celebrate all those who have made Scotland and the UK their home. My party backs calls for a major commemoration for the 75th anniversary next year so we can properly mark the valued contribution that those who came here have made.

This morning, it was revealed that UK inflation is now at a 40-year high. Families right across these islands are seeing their incomes squeezed as prices rise, bills soar, and Tory cuts and tax hikes hammer home. After 12 years in government, the Tories have left the UK economy in the doldrums and pushed millions of people into poverty, so can I ask the Prime Minister: does he think his Government bear any blame for the fact that the United Kingdom is doing so much worse than our European neighbours?

**The Prime Minister:** Actually, as I think the whole House knows and the whole country knows, we have a global inflationary problem, but this Government have the fiscal firepower to deal with it. That is, I think, of benefit to the whole of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, as we have seen throughout the pandemic, and I think it is a matter of fact that taxes are actually highest of all in Scotland.

**Ian Blackford:** Well, actually, that is not true. Of course, the Prime Minister can make all the excuses he likes, but the fact is that the UK economy is lagging behind on his watch. If he looks at France, inflation is less than 6% there. This morning's report from the Resolution Foundation and the London School of Economics is the latest in a string of devastating reports on the outlook for the UK economy. The report could not be clearer. The Tory Government's disastrous Brexit is driving wages down, pushing inflation up and will make us poorer over the next decade, but instead of reversing course, the Prime Minister is recklessly threatening a trade war at the worst possible time. Will he finally come to his senses and negotiate an economic agreement with the EU, or is he going to wilfully—wilfully—push the UK into recession?

**The Prime Minister:** Nobody wants a trade war, nor is there any need for one. I am afraid the right hon. Gentleman is underestimating what this country is currently achieving—not just the Moderna investment, but record venture capital investment in this country, which has now overtaken China as a venue for venture capital investment, to say nothing of what we are getting in tech, and of course the benefits of that are being felt throughout the whole of the United Kingdom.

Q5. [900649] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I very much support the Government's work to level up all parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland and my constituency in the Scottish Borders. For the Scottish Borders, improved transport connectivity is the key to levelling up, so will the Prime Minister reconfirm his Government's support for improvements to the cross-border A1 road and the feasibility study to extend the Borders railway to Hawick and Newcastleton and on to Carlisle?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for an excellent piece of lobbying. Certainly, the Department for Transport is working with Transport Scotland on the possible extension of the Borders railway to Carlisle. On the A1, a decision is to be made later this year.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It has emerged that there is a backlog of 23,000 applications under the Afghan relocations and assistance policy, with just two of 3,000 applications for refuge by Afghans who worked for Britain having been processed since April. At the same time, since December, staff working on the ARAP scheme have been slashed by a quarter. This is an incredible betrayal of the Afghan people who put their lives on the line to work for our country. I still have casework, including many people from the Chevening Alumni, for example, who have been promised support since September, so can I send those cases to the Prime Minister? Will he put more resources into the scheme? Will he lift the cap on the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme so that we can finally do our best for the people of Afghanistan?

**The Prime Minister:** I am afraid that the hon. Member is underestimating what the country is already doing for the people of Afghanistan. On Armed Forces Day, we should celebrate Op Pitting, which brought 15,000 out. Of course, I am happy to look at the cases that she wants to raise, and we will do our best for them and for their families, but the House should be in no doubt of the generous welcome that we continue to give to people from Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Hong Kong. We have a record to be very proud of.

Q6. [900650] **Andy Carter** (Warrington South) (Con): My constituents in Chapelford, Penketh, Great Sankey and Appleton all tell me that they want to see more police officers tackling issues such as antisocial behaviour, domestic abuse and burglary. Thanks to the initiatives of John Dwyer, the excellent police and crime commissioner in Cheshire, and sustained recruitment by the new chief constable, the hard work of our police officers is paying off, with an almost 50% increase in arrests for domestic abuse in Cheshire in the last 12 months. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on how many more

officers have been recruited in both Cheshire and across the UK since he became Prime Minister? Will he join me in recognising—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Can I just say that other Members do want to get in and, the longer the question, the fewer of them will get in? Your friendships will dwindle if you carry on like that.

**The Prime Minister:** I can tell my hon. Friend very briefly that it is 13,576 more police officers, with 200 more in Cheshire. They are also cutting neighbourhood crime—already by 31%—and our streets are getting safer as a result.

**Q3.** [900646] **Stephen Farry** (North Down) (Alliance): A clear majority of Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly reject the Government's protocol Bill and the Prime Minister's rationale for it. Businesses fear its consequences. The Prime Minister has made clear, on multiple occasions, his so-called commitment to all aspects of the Good Friday agreement, and that includes the European convention on human rights being part of domestic law, so how can he stand over that commitment when the Justice Secretary is about to publish a Bill that unpicks and disapplies the Human Rights Act in our domestic law? He cannot have it both ways.

**The Prime Minister:** If the hon. Gentleman will just wait for the Justice Secretary's statement, which follows shortly, I think he will find that he is in error in what he said.

**Q7.** [900651] **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): High wage, high skilled jobs are at the heart of my campaign to level up Rother Valley and tackle the cost of living crisis. I have personally hosted two jobs fairs, and thanks to an £11 million investment from the Government levelling-up fund, Rother Valley will benefit from a cutting-edge skills and employment village and a leading incubator space for training apprenticeships and start-ups, hosted at the old Maltby Grammar School, in areas neglected under Labour. In light of this, will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pledge his support for high wage, high skilled Rother Valley, level up our high streets, and also visit Rother Valley to see levelling up in action?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is probably the best Member for Rother Valley we have ever had. I thank him very much and we are going to continue our agenda of levelling up across the whole country, through all the difficulties this country has faced, which will get young people across the country, including in Rother Valley, into good jobs for generations to come. That is our ambition.

**Q8.** [900652] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): Tens of thousands of people were marching through London last weekend protesting against this out-of-touch Government, rail workers are on strike, and Royal Mail workers, NHS workers, teachers and even barristers are on the verge of taking industrial action. All workers are struggling to cope with the worst cost of living crisis in history. Ministers are planning to boost City bosses' pay while demanding wage restraint for everyone else, so can the Prime Minister tell me when

he is going to stop giving meaningless soundbites and instead start supporting working people across our country?

**The Prime Minister:** If the hon. Lady wants to support the working people of this country, I suggest she gets off the picket line, has a word with her party leader and supports the travelling public of this country, who want to see a reduction in their transport costs, which this Government are delivering.

**Q10.** [900654] **Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): For much of Britain levelling up means the revitalisation of British industry and the jobs that go with it. Many countries around the world, including Germany and China, get a competitive advantage by burning lignite, the dirtiest form of fossil fuel. Does my right hon. Friend share my concerns about the ethics of holding back British industry and exporting—and magnifying—our carbon emissions overseas, all in the name of net zero?

**The Prime Minister:** We can all be proud of the way we have reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in this country, but plainly it makes no sense to be importing coal, particularly for metallurgical purposes, when we have our own domestic resources.

**Q9.** [900653] **Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): The Prime Minister knows that we in Coventry and Warwickshire are proudly the UK's leading centre for vehicle battery innovation; he knows because he visited the UK Battery Industrialisation Centre just last year. If this Government want this vital sector to survive for the future, the Prime Minister needs to confirm his support: will he give a concrete guarantee for the resources needed for the west midlands gigafactory project to go ahead, so we can deliver much-needed skilled jobs in Coventry for 2025?

**The Prime Minister:** That is probably the first sensible question from the Opposition Benches, and I can tell the hon. Lady that we do actively support gigafactories because I believe they can be a huge advantage for the UK economy. That is why I am proud to see one now in Blyth, and we are working with the authorities in the west midlands, in Coventry, to make sure we also get a successful result there.

**Q11.** [900655] **Sir Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): Hereford Sixth Form College has over 600 students who rely on the trains to get them to their exams this week. What can my right hon. Friend do to ensure that these young people doing their GCSEs and A-levels are not punished by the train strikers?

**The Prime Minister:** I know how much my hon. Friend cares for the students in his constituency and I can tell him that no exams have been cancelled as a result of the strikes so far. We expect schools and colleges to have contingency arrangements in place to manage disruption. If students arrive late, schools should allow them to take the paper, and exam boards will determine if that paper can be marked based on how late the student has arrived. I am also told that if a student misses an exam completely, the school can apply for their grades to be calculated from the other assessments they have completed in that subject. I hope that is helpful to my hon. Friend.



**Sir George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): The Prime Minister will be aware of the problems that arose in Paris at the European cup final. Does he agree that both the French and UEFA authorities' attempts to blame Liverpool fans for the failure to keep order at the stadium has been comprehensively disproved, and will he ensure that the French failure to police the event is roundly condemned?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the whole House will have seen how those initial accounts of what took place were completely debunked and proved to be incorrect in respect of the Liverpool fans, and I think it was right that the French authorities and, I think, UEFA issued a full apology for what had happened.

Q12. [900656] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Taking back control is to apply to the European Court of Human Rights too, isn't it?

**The Prime Minister:** I think my right hon. Friend should wait for my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to say a little about that in just a moment, but I can tell him that when it comes to the Rwanda policy that we are pursuing, that policy has not been ruled unlawful by any UK court or, so far, by any international court, and we will continue with that policy.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): The father-in-law of my constituent Ibrahim is a former Supreme Court judge in Afghanistan. He successfully prosecuted and put behind bars hundreds of terrorists associated with the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS. Seven months after he submitted his ARAP application, there has still been no progress, and he is living in hiding. His only option is a perilous journey to Pakistan, where, if his visa is refused, he will be deported back into the hands of the Taliban. Will the Prime Minister meet me and the former judge's family to see how we can save the life of a man who I have no doubt has helped to save hundreds of British lives?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising that case. It does sound extremely meritorious. I will make sure that she has a meeting with the Ministry of Defence, which runs ARAP, and that we do our best to expedite that application as fast as we can.

Q13. [900658] **Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I am proud to represent more than 1,000 park home residents. When will the Government address the injustice of pitch fees determined by the retail prices index, and how will they ensure that all those residents can benefit from the energy grant?

**The Prime Minister:** As soon as parliamentary time allows, we will introduce legislation to change the inflationary index used in the calculation of the annual pitch fees to the consumer prices index. I am told that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has undertaken research on the impacts on residents and site owners of a change in the 10% commission that is currently paid on the sale of a park home.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): I am sure the Prime Minister is as thrilled as I am that you, Mr Speaker, signed the Wellbeing of Women menopause workplace pledge last week to show support for women in this place. Will the Prime Minister follow that example and ensure that women in England have better access to treatment by introducing a single annual payment for hormone replacement therapy now, rather than making them wait until April 2023, a full 18 months after the payment was first promised?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Lady very much for raising a very important issue that is understood keenly in all parts of the House. I know that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary is accelerating the work of the HRT taskforce to give people up and down the country the reassurance and the treatment that they need.

**Dean Russell** (Watford) (Con): I was incredibly grateful to the Prime Minister for coming to Watford to launch my initiative to train 1,000 mental health first aiders in awareness more than a year and a half ago. Since then, it has been delivered successfully by Watford and West Herts chamber of commerce and many amazing volunteers. I know that the Prime Minister understands the importance of mental health and wellbeing, but, sadly, bullying can have a long-lasting effect on it. Today, the Diana Award is raising awareness of bullying in schools and online with its "Don't Face It Alone" campaign. Will the Prime Minister please join me in encouraging any young person experiencing bullying to speak up and speak out?

**The Prime Minister:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his own campaign on this issue. I think everyone understands that bullying is an appalling experience, and something that we should not tolerate in our society. I am delighted to see so many colleagues—so many hon. Members—wearing their blue ribbons today. We should all speak out against bullying, but we should also make sure that we give everyone the courage to speak out against it.



## Bill of Rights

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call the Deputy Prime Minister to make his statement, I have to say to him and the Government that I am extremely disappointed that, once again, an important Government policy has been presented to the media before being presented to this House. Why the BBC and Sky News are more important, I will never know. I say again that this is simply not acceptable.

One thing that did not change in the recently revised ministerial code is this important statement:

“When Parliament is in session, the most important announcements of Government policy should be made, in the first instance, in Parliament.”

Yet again, the media have been the first to know.

I am glad the Deputy Prime Minister is making this statement, but he should have done so before speaking to the media. I would certainly have granted an urgent question, and I thank Mr Bone for tabling one just in case the statement had not been forthcoming. The Government should be aware that I will always do this in similar circumstances. I have to say that I nearly granted both, and I do not want to be put in that position again, so please respect this House and respect Members of every political party. They are elected to hear things here, not via the news.

12.36 pm

**The Deputy Prime Minister (Dominic Raab):** We strived to make sure we kept within the trammels of what had been in the consultation document, but I heed your advice as ever, Mr Speaker.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the publication and introduction of a UK Bill of Rights as we take the next steps to fulfil our manifesto commitment and deliver human rights reform across the country.

We have a proud tradition of freedom under the rule of law in this country, and I remind hon. Members on both sides of the House that it dates back centuries to Magna Carta, not just to 1998. This Bill of Rights, published today, is the next chapter in the evolution and strengthening of our human rights framework, and it is available online and in the Vote Office.

I now turn to the key strands of our reforms. First, as I said when we launched the consultation back in December, the UK intends to remain a state party to the European convention on human rights. It is a set of common-sense principles, and the problems we have encountered stem from its elastic interpretation and expansion, absent meaningful democratic oversight, particularly as a result of the procedural framework set out in the Human Rights Act.

The key objective of our reform is to reinforce quintessential UK rights such as freedom of speech, the liberty that guards all the others. We will also recognise the role of jury trials, mindful of how they operate in different parts of the United Kingdom. Jury trials are not prevalent on the continent, but they are very much part of this country's heritage and pedigree. These liberties are part of our proud history, but they are also critical to strengthening our place in the world as an open, vibrant and rambunctious democracy.

We will also strengthen the separation of powers in this country, affirming the supremacy of the Supreme Court and making it explicit that UK courts are under no obligation to follow Strasbourg case law and, indeed, are free to diverge from it. I am proud of our world-beating judiciary, and what is the point of a Supreme Court if it bows in subordination to a European court?

We have seen the goalposts on human rights shift over time through expanded judicial interpretations, licensed by the Human Rights Act, which has tended to magnify overweening rulings from Strasbourg, although it is worth noting in fairness that there has been more judicial restraint in Strasbourg on occasion in recent times. Nevertheless, what ebbs may flow, and we will ensure in our Bill of Rights that any expansion of human rights law—as opposed to its interpretation—is subject to proper democratic oversight by elected Members in this House. Our reforms to sections 2 and 3 of the Human Rights Act in particular will squarely address the flaws in the current framework.

We will be crystal clear that when it comes to the laws of the land, and the legitimate, necessary and constructive dialogue we have with Strasbourg, it is Parliament that has the last word. Much has been said by the judiciary in Strasbourg about an age of subsidiarity, with greater respect for the will of domestic democratic institutions, particularly since the 2012 Brighton declaration, which the UK spearheaded to promote reform. Our approach is crafted with that in mind in order to facilitate that dialogue between the UK and Strasbourg, and to avail ourselves of the margin of appreciation within the bounds of the convention. Equally, as a matter of basic democratic principle, we will reaffirm and reinforce the democratic oversight and control exercised by this House.

Our Bill of Rights sets out a range of important reforms, including a permissions stage in the UK courts to assert greater checks over frivolous claims at an earlier stage, reflecting the Strasbourg Court itself, which has an admissibility stage. We have included provision to ensure that the behaviour of anyone claiming a breach of their human rights is taken into account when our courts consider compensation; it is a principle of law in this country that those who come into equity do so with clean hands, and I think that should be reflected in human rights claims.

We will expressly provide for greater weight to be given to Parliament's determination of the public interest, as set out in primary legislation, when considering the interpretation of rights in order to ensure that we are better equipped to protect the public. That will reinforce our ability to, for example, deport more foreign national offenders, particularly those claiming ever more elastic interpretations of article 8 on the right to family life to frustrate the deportation process.

Our Bill of Rights will ensure that we can deliver our reforms to the parole system, so that when it comes to finely balanced assessments of risk in decisions on the release of potentially dangerous offenders, public protection is the overriding priority. It will also prevent well-meaning but counter-productive and onerous straitjacket regulatory burdens from being placed on our public services as a result of rulings determined by lawyers in court rather than regulation on such sensitive matters being set by elected lawmakers in this House. That is particularly important with respect to finely balanced assessments

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

of social policy, and matters with a financial impact—the bread-and-butter issues that it is for this Parliament to decide.

We have consulted and engaged widely across the whole United Kingdom, and will continue to do so. This is a UK-wide reform, but we want to work with all the devolved Administrations on these essential reforms, so we will be seeking legislative consent motions—noting, nevertheless, the status of the Human Rights Act as a “protected enactment” under the devolution settlements, meaning that reform, replacement or revision can take place only from Westminster.

Our Bill of Rights will strengthen our proud tradition of freedom, demarcate a clearer separation of powers, ensure greater respect for our democratic institutions, better protect the public, and restore a healthy dose of common sense to the justice system, which is essential for commanding greater public confidence. Ultimately, it will make us freer and help to keep our streets safer. I commend this statement to the House.

12.43 pm

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending our deepest condolences to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed), who, following the death of his father last week, cannot be here today.

This is a very dark day for victims of crime, for women, for people in care—for everyone in this country who relies on the state to protect them from harm. This is not a Bill of Rights; it is a con. The Lord Chancellor knows this because he has been working on it for more than a decade. We know from the Queen’s Speech that the Bill will take away the duty of the state to protect everyone from harm by removing the positive obligations set out in the Human Rights Act. It will force victims of crime seeking justice to schlep to Strasbourg, creating endless delays and red tape.

Sir Peter Gross and the review panel do not think the Human Rights Act undermines parliamentary sovereignty or that the UK courts are undermined by the European Court, so why proceed with this Bill? Because this Government look to pick a fight to cover up their own failures, and then find someone else to blame. We have seen a succession of Conservative Members blame the European Court to deflect from their bungled and unworkable asylum policy. Shamefully, some have even demanded that the UK withdraw altogether from the European convention on human rights. For members of the party of Churchill, who inspired the convention, to want to do away with it altogether is quite something. I gather that the Deputy Prime Minister does not want to withdraw from the European convention, not least because he knows it would fatally undermine the Good Friday agreement and peace in Northern Ireland, so will he condemn members of his own party who have made that dangerous and reckless demand?

Labour Members are proud of the gift that Churchill gave to the world in the universal declaration and in the European convention that followed, but we are prouder still that it was a Labour Government who, in 1998, brought rights home from Strasbourg. The Human Rights Act is held up around the world as an exemplar of modern human rights legislation, which is why the

European Court very rarely overrules our judges, as the review panel recognised in its report. It is a beacon of hope for people in countries where basic human rights are trampled over by strongmen and dictators. There is no better example than Ukraine, where the rights of millions are being crushed under the jackboot of Vladimir Putin. What stunning hypocrisy from this Government to preach to others about the importance of defending rights abroad while snatching away British people’s rights at home. This is a Government gimmick by a party that seeks headlines for botched policies and then blames others when they fail.

The answer to fixing the mess that this Conservative Government have made of the immigration and asylum system is not to take away British people’s rights given to them by the Human Rights Act. That Act has allowed people to object when doctors put “do not resuscitate” orders on their bed without their consent. It has allowed people with learning disabilities imprisoned in locked units to be reunited with their families. It has allowed families affected by major disasters such as Manchester or Hillsborough to seek justice when public bodies have let them down. It has allowed elderly married couples in residential care to object when care home managers try to separate them, and it has allowed victims of rapists such as John Worboys to force the police to investigate cases of rape.

This Bill of Rights con is not just an attack on victims of crime whom the state has failed to protect; it is an attack on women. Women have used the Human Rights Act to challenge the police when they have either failed or refused to investigate rape and sexual assault cases. We saw that in the case of John Worboys, who is thought to have assaulted more than 150 women. It should come as no surprise that this Bill has been brought forward by a Conservative Government who have effectively decriminalised rape. [Interruption.] Last week’s scorecard showed pitiful progress on the record low—[Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. People who have been wanting to catch my eye will not do it by shouting when somebody is speaking.

**Ellie Reeves:** Last week’s scorecard showed pitiful progress on the record low rate of convictions under this Government. The typical wait for cases to complete in court has reached three years, and a fifth have seen waits of four years—and that is if the case even gets to court. The number of rape trials postponed at a day’s notice in our Crown courts has risen fourfold. It is no wonder that rape survivors are dropping out of their cases in droves. Will victims even bother to report their case at all when they learn that the Deputy Prime Minister’s Bill of Rights will stop them forcing our under-resourced police to investigate? It says everything about a Lord Chancellor and a Government who are soft on rape, soft on rapists and hard on survivors, that they want to take away the final backstop available to victims to get justice. Women will be in no doubt that this is a Government who let off rapists and let survivors down, and today is the proof.

The Bill will see enormous amounts of red tape for victims of crime seeking justice. It is an attack on women and it undermines peace in Northern Ireland. It is the hallmark of a party out of ideas that can no longer govern.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I just say to the Front Benchers that there are times given, so can we please stick to them? I do not want to stop Ministers or shadow Ministers, but I will in future. You must stick to the allocated time.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I join the hon. Lady in what she said about the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed). I extend my sympathy and my condolences to him.

I listened very carefully to what the shadow Justice Minister said. I think I disagreed with everything she said, but then again, she said very little about our Bill of Rights. When she gets a chance to read it, I look forward to debating it with her further. May I just correct a couple of the obviously flawed things she said? She talked about whether or not we will leave the European convention on human rights. When she gets a chance to read the Bill of Rights, she will see that not only are we staying a part of the ECHR, but that it is incorporated in the Bill of Rights. I have to say that the comparison with what Russia or Putin does shows, I am afraid, a lack of a moral compass on the Labour Benches, not the Conservative Benches.

The hon. Lady then diverted into a monologue on a very serious subject in relation to rape. Let us be absolutely crystal clear: there is absolutely nothing in the Bill of Rights that will do anything to weaken the protections of victims; far from it in relation to the deportation of foreign national criminals, the release of dangerous rapists, and what we do inside our prisons. It will strengthen our protection of victims and public protection. Again, for the record, on such a serious issue—I agree with the hon. Lady on its importance—she might get her facts straight. The volume of rape convictions has increased by two thirds in the last year alone. I am working very closely with the Home Secretary, the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions, and we are absolutely determined and restless to go even further and faster.

I suspect, however, that that was really a distraction from the fundamental issue, which is the Bill of Rights and human rights reform to get the right balance. The hon. Lady and the Labour party are blind to the flaws in the Human Rights Act in the way that its architects are not. Jack Straw said back in 2007 that he wanted to rebalance the rights set out in the Act, adding explicitly that responsibilities should play a role. They are all in here in our Bill of Rights. He went on to say, in an interview in December 2008, that

“There is a sense that it’s a villains’ charter”.

Mr Speaker, I have not used that language, but I will just say how far the sense of critical self-evaluation on the Labour Benches has gone when the hon. Lady cannot talk about anything that could possibly be reformed.

The model we have taken is based on a textbook that I read back in 1999, written by a very learned authority. He said, on the relationship between the UK and Strasbourg—the hon. Lady mentioned that, not with any specific points—that the role of the Strasbourg Court is

“primarily concerned with supervision and its role is therefore subsidiary to that of domestic authorities”.

Subsidiary, not superior. It has no role unless the domestic system for protecting human rights breaks down altogether. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) asks from a sedentary position who the author is. It was the leader of the Labour party, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), in his seminal textbook on the subject. All I would gently say is that I think he made a more convincing lawyer than he does a politician.

This week we have seen Labour shadow Ministers line up with picketers against the public. Today, the shadow Justice Minister has confirmed that the Labour party will stand in the way of our common-sense reforms that will ensure a better balance of human rights, so that we can stand up for victims—it is always against that when it comes to sentencing or extra police recruitment—deport more foreign national offenders and safely incarcerate the most dangerous people in our prisons. Whenever Labour Members are asked the big questions, they duck. Yet again, the Labour party is showing it is simply not fit to govern.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Thank you for your statement earlier, Mr Speaker. I think the vast majority of Members of this House agree entirely.

I congratulate the Secretary of State on his statement. The issue is really very simple: this sovereign Parliament makes laws and our courts interpret them. We should not have the judicial creep of a European Court not interpreting laws, but making new laws. I am willing to support the Bill, but if in practice it fails, will the Secretary of State be willing to support my private Member’s Bill, the British Bill of Rights and Withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights Bill?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for his tenacity in all these matters. I always listen to him, and I will study his private Member’s Bill. He makes two points. First, there is really no point in having a Supreme Court if it is subordinate to Strasbourg in the interpretation of law. He must be right about that, and our Bill of Rights will expressly address it.

My hon. Friend’s other point is more subtle, but very powerful. I remember our jointly participating in many debates on prisoners’ voting rights, a very clear example of the goalposts shifting. When it comes to legislative functions, it ought to be a point of common agreement across the parties that those matters must be for hon. Members, who are accountable to our constituents, to decide in this House.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson.

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): This Bill of Rights and the removal of the Human Rights Act are the culmination of multiple pieces of legislation that have gone through this place in the past year. They are all about one thing: removing human rights from human beings. First, the Government came for the refugees with the Nationality and Borders Act 2022; they told them that their lives did not count. Secondly, they came for those who need to question decisions made about their lives by public bodies, including this Government; the Judicial Review and Courts Act 2022 stopped them being effectively able to do that. Then they went for the voters with the Elections Act 2022,



[Anne McLaughlin]

and what do you know? The voters they were targeting were the ones least likely to vote Conservative—the sensible ones, in other words.

The Government then went after the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. They told them that their way of life was unacceptable—well, it is not unacceptable to us. When the Government did not get their way on public order with that Bill, they repackaged it and brought it back in the Public Order Bill, which will take away the rights of anybody to fight for the rights of anybody else. Who would go to a protest when they could be stopped and searched without any suspicion?

It is all about one thing: removing human rights from human beings. This policy, the culmination of it all, is about removing everybody's human rights. Human rights are not about one group of people, the group the Secretary of State likes to pick on; they are about everybody living on these islands.

I will ask three quick questions and leave the rest to my colleagues. First, why is there a lack of prelegislative scrutiny? What are the Government so afraid of? Secondly, why is the Secretary of State telling people that this policy will bring rights home, when it will actually force people to go to Strasbourg to get justice? Finally, the Scottish and Welsh Governments have made it clear that they are completely against the policy in its entirety. We have a tale of two countries: Scotland is embedding human rights law in all its legislation, while this Government are stripping it away completely. How would the Secretary of State advise the people of Scotland who want to retain human rights law in their legislation to vote in next year's independence referendum—yes or no?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Lady, but clearly I disagree. First, no country has been more big-hearted when it comes to those fleeing persecution, from Hong Kong British nationals overseas to the 17,000 who were evacuated out of Afghanistan and the 125,000-plus visas in relation to Ukraine. The hon. Lady talks about standing up for those people; when our Prime Minister addressed the Ukraine Parliament, Union Jacks were flying and people were singing “God Save the Queen” in towns and villages across the country.

When it comes to protecting human rights, we should be big-hearted, but we should also stop the trade in human misery across the channel, which is a real threat to human rights. We should also make sure that we stand up for victims—the hon. Lady does not seem to care too much about that—in relation to the deportation of foreign national offenders. That is something that I think the people of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland all agree on. Why would the hon. Lady not support common-sense reforms and a rebalancing of the system to allow us to stand up for victims, stand up for the public and remove serious foreign criminals?

**Sir Robert Buckland** (South Swindon) (Con): I welcome this statement, which builds on the work that I and Sir Peter Gross did with his important review. Sir Peter's balanced committee did not say that all was well with the Human Rights Act 1998. There were issues to be dealt with, and in accordance with our manifesto commitment to update the Act, the Bill of Rights is timely. Does the

Deputy Prime Minister agree that, over and above domestic action that we can take to reform and improve legislation, there is a strong case for international work to be done—on the same basis as the work we did in Brighton 10 years ago—in order to deal with issues such as extraterritorial jurisdiction? That is a common concern not just in this country, but among our judges and many other member states of the Council of Europe.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend for the painstaking groundwork he did in the Ministry of Justice, and to Sir Peter Gross and his panel. All that work substantially influenced the shape of the reforms that we are able to announce today; they would not have been possible without the hard work that my right hon. and learned Friend put in. He is right to point to the 2012 Brighton declaration, because the Strasbourg Court under Róbert Spanó—its latest President, who is Icelandic—has talked about shifting from an age of a living instrument to an age of subsidiarity. People talk about our relationship, and it is important that we stick to the convention, but it is also important that the European Court follows its own strictures.

My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned extraterritorial jurisdiction. I will certainly follow up on his advice, as the issue is also addressed in the Bill of Rights. Again, I thank him for his contribution.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Deputy Prime Minister is right about the priority that must be given to public protection, but may I urge him to proceed with care in reforming parole arrangements? Ministers have already taken measures that will give them a veto over the transfer of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences to open conditions, and he will know that there are real concerns that, as well as being procedurally unfair, such measures may increase the risk to public protection. Will he reassure the House that he will make public protection a priority over political gimmickry?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I thank the hon. Lady for what she has said. I certainly agree that public protection is our overriding concern. The proposals for parole reform that we have published for consultation make it clear that, in the context of convicted murderers, rapists, terrorists and child killers, we want to ensure that there is a ministerial check in finely balanced cases where there is genuine risk to the public and to public confidence but it is hard to predict. If we agree on the principle of putting public protection first, I hope she will agree that that should command cross-party support.

**Dame Andrea Leadsom** (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I am frankly disgusted by what the shadow Minister had to say. To suggest that right hon. and hon. Members on the Conservative Benches would be soft on rapists—she sits there shaking her head now—is a shameful thing to say, and it undermines women's confidence in our judicial system across this country. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the centuries of experience in our UK judicial system, we can be incredibly confident that it is able to represent the interests of everybody in this country? Does he share my sadness that so many on the Opposition Benches would throw away our sovereignty to anyone else who would have it?



**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. She is right that there never seems to be an opportunity to throw away the powers and authority that we have in this House that the Opposition do not grasp with total alacrity.

Rape is such a sensitive issue, and we have seen convictions increase by two thirds. There is a whole range of other work, including Operation Soteria, pre-recorded witness evidence under section 28, and the disclosure reforms that my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) is looking at. We ought to be trying to build on the progress that we have made, not do it down, because that is the stuff that undermines women's confidence in the justice system. We know there is a longer road—[*Interruption.*] Hold on. We know that there is much more to do, but that work is not going to get done with the hyperbolic language used by the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves).

**Mr Speaker:** I call the acting Chair of the Select Committee, Joanna Cherry.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): As acting Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, I wish to remind the Secretary of State that we have completed two in-depth, unanimous cross-party reports, which concluded that the Human Rights Act is working well and does not need to be repealed or replaced. Indeed, that was the conclusion of the independent review, which the Secretary of State commissioned and then ignored.

When we visited Strasbourg last week, we were told that UK Government Ministers have given repeated assurances that the UK will remain in the ECHR, and I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State reiterate that assurance this morning. However, the Prime Minister did make some veiled threats in the opposite direction last week. If we are to stay in the ECHR, it needs to be done with integrity. We cannot pick and choose which convention rights we want to observe or for whom we want to observe them. Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the United Kingdom's disengagement from the ECHR—make no mistake, Mr Speaker, that is what this Bill is about—risks giving encouragement to populist Governments in eastern Europe who have scant regard for human rights or, indeed, the rule of law?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** No, I am afraid I do not agree with the hon. and learned Lady, not least because I do not see how she can sustain the argument that we are dislocating ourselves when not only are we remaining a state party, but it is in the Bill of Rights as well.

I pay tribute to the work of the hon. and learned Lady's Committee. I appeared in front of the JCHR on 8 December. The noble Lord Wolfson appeared on 2 February, and I am attending again on 20 July. We will pay great respect to the role of the Joint Committee, but, of course, we know that there are likely to be objections and we will try to assuage those held by her and her members as best we can.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there will be many who will be extremely glad that he has now introduced his Bill of Rights? It means, as he said just now, that our Parliament and our judges will have the last word. We look forward

to seeing the text of the Bill, and we trust that it will ensure that the European Court in Strasbourg will never again be able to frustrate the United Kingdom's right to deport illegal immigrants and, at the same time, override our own judges.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the long-standing work that he has done, on the constitutional dimension in particular. I can give him the direct assurance—I have a copy of the Bill of Rights here and it is also available in the House—that we address squarely the issue that he raises. We want to make sure that elected Members from both sides of the House have the last word when it comes to resetting or expanding the laws of this land.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): This morning, the distinguished legal commentator, Joshua Rozenberg, summed up this Bill not as the biggest constitutional tour de force in more than 300 years or the apex of the Justice Secretary's career, but as a ragbag of restrictions. It will undoubtedly cause harm to many thousands of our citizens, especially those who are the most vulnerable and have suffered discrimination by an unchecked state. It will also cause harm to this country's hard-won reputation as a champion of international law. As a constitutional document, is it not a damp squib and a legal nonsense that sets up confusion and conflict between domestic and European courts?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** May I gently say to the hon. Gentleman, of whom I am quite fond and with whom I have debated these issues many times, it cannot be both ripping up human rights and a damp squib? May I suggest that he reads what people have to say on this—including Jonathan Fisher QC, who has written a very thoughtful piece about reform; Lord Sumption, a former justice of the Supreme Court; and John Larkin, a former Attorney General in Northern Ireland? He might get a slightly more sober analysis.

**Laura Farris** (Newbury) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the letter that he wrote to the Justice Committee this morning. In it, he said "The Bill will prevent human rights from being used as a way to bring claims on overseas military operations", but does he recall that some of the gravest crimes of the Iraq war were revealed only through recourse to the Human Rights Act, enforced in our domestic courts? I think particularly of the systematic torture of detainees by British soldiers in Basra which was revealed in the Baha Mousa case only because of the Human Rights Act, after the Ministry of Defence had declined to investigate. Can he provide reassurances to the House that the new Bill of Rights will not operate to suppress such serious human rights abuses coming to light in the future?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I understand my hon. Friend's point. Of course, we need to have proper accountability when anything goes wrong. The professionalism of our armed forces is second to none, but mistakes can happen and there needs to be accountability. The reality is that we have the international law of armed conflict, which is designed to do that. It has been unhelpful, and indeed has created legal uncertainty, to layer an extra tier of human rights obligations on top of that. It has created uncertainty as to the state of the law, and huge uncertainty for our armed forces. We will make sure that there is the

[*The Deputy Prime Minister*]

accountability that she seeks, but we will also deal with the extraterritorial jurisdiction, which, frankly, has encouraged litigation and many spurious claims, as well as the ones that she mentioned.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Paragraph 2 of the human rights chapter of the Good Friday agreement provides that

“The British Government will complete incorporation into Northern Ireland law of the European Convention on Human Rights...with direct access to the courts, and remedies for breach of the Convention”.

Can the Justice Secretary tell the House whether the Bill constitutes a unilateral repudiation of that, or is that something that he has negotiated with the Government of Ireland?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman is wrong, although he is right to reference the Belfast agreement. We remain a state party to the convention. Not only that, but the ECHR remains incorporated into UK law through the schedule. [*Interruption.*] He is chuntering from a sedentary position; I genuinely enjoy debating these issues, as we have on many occasions. If he reads the Bill, I will be very happy to address any other questions he has.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The Secretary of State and Attorney General are to be commended for taking seriously the task of taking back control of our ancient legal entitlements from unelected, unaccountable foreign judges, and of rooting them in the people's Parliament here in Westminster. In doing so, will he challenge the assumptions that underpin the Human Rights Act, which are that rights are more important than responsibilities and that injury to interest is more important than duty? That is the fundamental issue. Will he challenge and, at last, dock the long tail of Blairism?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I thank my right hon. Friend for, as ever, the colourful and eloquent way that he presents the issue. When it comes to collective interest, social policy and finely balanced judgments around public protection, I do think that adjudication in court by lawyers, rather than a broader discussion and debate among elected Members of Parliament accountable to their citizens, is a mistake. We will protect the fundamental freedoms that make this country great—they existed long before the Human Rights Act and they will exist long after. He is right about the balance between protecting individual liberty and freedom under the rule of law, of which I am immensely proud, and making sure that elected Members of this House can protect the public, take finely balanced judgments on social policy, and take judgments that affect the public purse.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Many of our constituents have seen the benefits of human rights, such as the bereaved unmarried widows who had to take the Government to court to make sure that their children were not ignored when it came to pensions, or the women in Northern Ireland who are counting on us to support the statutory instrument to make sure that they have the human right to choose what happens to their own body and to have an abortion. They will be

reassured by the Deputy Prime Minister saying that we will remain signatories to the European convention. Can he confirm to his colleagues, who might want to think about the implications of that, that because we will remain signatories and bound by the convention, the European Court of Human Rights will remain the ultimate judicial decision maker on human rights in this country? He is not getting rid of Europe; he is just wasting our time.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady is right about the first point, but wrong about the second. That is clear from the Bill of Rights.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): My right hon. Friend started by talking about the 2012 declaration on subsidiarity. He will remember that that flowed directly from action in this Chamber to push back against prisoner votes, of which I think he was a major part. We have not seen the detail of this Bill of Rights, but there are two Conservative tests for it. First, the Conservatives do not believe in an overmighty state, therefore the state has to be curbed by an independent body. Secondly, our fundamental freedoms, such as free speech, jury trial or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) mentioned, freedom from torture, are not the gift of the state but the birth right of our citizens. As such, they all have to be protected by powers vested in an independent judiciary. At the end of the day, the test will be whether the Bill of Rights delivers better protection for those things than the European process.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend is too generous: he was really the architect of the campaign to defend this House's prerogative to decide on prisoner voting. Interestingly, he did that with Jack Straw, the architect of the Human Rights Act, but my right hon. Friend is right to say that it was this House that pushed back in 2012 and sought the Government to ensure that the Strasbourg Court was reflecting and following its mandate, which was at the heart of the Brighton declaration process.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right in his tests, and I hope I can reassure him on this. When he gets a chance, as I know he will, to study carefully the Bill of Rights, which is now available, he will see that our fundamental freedoms are not being trashed, but that they are being preserved and safeguarded. He will see that judicial independence is being strengthened, because the Supreme Court in this country ought to have the last word, to cherish and nurture this country's common law tradition, which is ancient.

Finally, my right hon. Friend missed one point, but I hope he agrees with me on this. In broader terms, beyond individual rights, there is a whole realm of public policy—whether it reflects collective interest, social policy, the public purse or public protection—on which it must be this House and its elected Members, who are responsible to our constituents, who have the final word.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State share with me the level of support he has for this legislation from the people who will make it work—the lawyers, judges and other professionals? I am not a lawyer, but because I have campaigned with the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert

Neill) on miscarriages of justice, I have mixed with a lot of lawyers; I have to say that I am worried about the number of lawyers who do not understand the reason for the Bill at this moment.

There have been three Queen's Speeches with a promise for a royal commission into the justice system, but that has never appeared; it has not gone anywhere. The last thing I want the Secretary of State to remember is that the justice system is in a mess. The barristers are on strike, we cannot get criminal lawyers to represent anyone and the fact is that the Department of Justice has had the biggest cut in budget since 2010 of any Department.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I enjoy engaging with the hon. Gentleman, but he is simply wrong. We have had the biggest increase for over a decade in the spending review, so he is simply wrong on the facts, but I am happy to write to him on that.

On lawyers, of course different lawyers will take different views, but I do not think there are any greater authorities than Lord Sumption, the former justice of the Supreme Court, or Jonathan Fisher QC—*[Interruption.]* He is shaking his head, but he has just asked me to point him in the direction of some lawyers and I am giving him the most authoritative ones that have recently written on this subject. Jonathan Fisher has written about this today, and there is also John Larkin, the former Attorney General for Northern Ireland. If the hon. Gentleman peruses those opinions and that recent commentary, he might get the reassurance and clarity he needs.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): This Parliament is the main guarantor of our rights and liberties; it created them in battles over many centuries for the benefit of us all. Would not this great role be strengthened if our Supreme Court were indeed supreme and not answerable to foreign courts that do not understand the mood of the British people and what they expect of their legislators?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. I know that when he gets a chance to peruse the proposals, he will find those principles and that spirit reflected in the Bill of Rights, and I look forward to discussing these matters with him further.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has asserted that 70% of successful human rights challenges are brought by foreign nationals who cite a right to family life in the first instance when appealing deportation orders. Can he give the House the source of that assertion?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The consultation document gives hon. Members the precise source; it was published back in December.

**Damian Green** (Ashford) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on resisting the siren voices in this House and outside telling him to withdraw from the European convention on human rights altogether. His decision to stay in it is in the best traditions of pragmatic, sensible, one nation Conservatism. Will he also confirm that the permission test he talked about to stop frivolous uses of human rights legislation simply inserts into the British courts a right already available to the Strasbourg Court under article 35 of the convention?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend is correct on all those points. This is a principled and pragmatic reform. It retains membership of the European convention. I have heard various arguments against that, but looking at what we would gain from leaving the ECHR, because of the UN convention against torture, which we are party to, and various other conventions, it would not solve all the problems. It is not the magic wand that some people suggest it is; I say that with great respect. We have made sure that within the bounds of the convention we can get the maximum leeway—the maximum marginal appreciation—in the way that my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) suggested.

On the permissions test, it is extraordinary that people have criticised doing something that the Strasbourg Court itself does. Making sure that whether they are trivial or frivolous claims, we have a filter early on to make sure that there is significant disadvantage, would, I think, just feel to many of our constituents like old-fashioned common sense.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The UK Government's scrapping of the Human Rights Act shows a callous disregard not only for the essential universality of human rights but for devolution in Wales too. The Human Rights Act is woven directly into Wales's constitutional settlement. Changes to the Act will undermine our efforts to promote human rights and equality. When—when, not if—Wales refuses legislative consent to this erosion of human rights, will the Minister use legalistic bully-boy tactics to trample on our democracy too?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** No, of course not. The right hon. Lady talks about "callous disregard". Conservative Members, certainly, want to stand up for victims of crime who do not understand why, based on the most elastic interpretations, foreign national offenders who have committed some of the most abhorrent crimes cannot be deported.

On parole, I think of the victims I have met recently. I do not want to politicise this, but they expect us to stand up for them. As regards protecting not just those within the prison regime but the public from serious ideologues spreading their poison or those who commit terrorist offences, we should stand up for the public, not for the criminals.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): My right hon. Friend made it absolutely clear in his statement, and has indeed reiterated in his answers since, that the Government intend that the United Kingdom shall remain party to the European convention on human rights, so it is hard to see the reason for the confusion on the part of the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves). Does he agree that judges of the United Kingdom Supreme Court are more than qualified to determine issues arising under that convention and that the intervention of a supranational court is not always necessary or welcome?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The irony, with regard to case law, is that there is nothing in the European convention that requires the doctrine of precedent, which does not



[*The Deputy Prime Minister*]

apply in the continental system—let alone in the Strasbourg Court—to somehow be transported, in relation to European case law, to the UK. That is not required. I have been very clear, when we have these debates and when we look at the text of the convention, that I am very proud of the judiciary we have in this country.

Speaking as Lord Chancellor and as a member of this Government, of course there will be difficult decisions, and from time to time Governments do not agree with them, but we have a judiciary renowned the world over and they should have the last word when it comes to interpreting the law of the land. It is extraordinary that Labour, which changed the name of the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords to the Supreme Court, would abrogate those rights and that authority.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): We know that the Supreme Court has reversed seven of its decisions in the past two years thanks to the bullying of the Government—[*Interruption.*] Check the record. So if we remove the protection of Strasbourg, do we not have a situation where things that are regarded as human rights abuse and illegal in Europe will become permissible in Britain? If it is okay to have rights not applying in the UK, is it okay for other countries not to apply certain rights, such as in eastern Europe and Russia—in which case human rights become optional instead of universal, and Winston Churchill would turn in his grave?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman betrays a fundamental lack of trust in the UK judiciary that I do not share. He talks about a lot of false premises that a cursory reading of the Bill of Rights will clarify.

**Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): As a former journalist, I firmly believe that freedom of speech is an indispensable British value. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this essential right will be protected and safeguarded by this very welcome Bill?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend who, as ever, nails a very important part of why the Bill of Rights is a human rights enhancing innovation. If he looks at section 4, he will see that not only do we prize free speech but we are reinforcing its role in protecting journalistic sources and balancing the rights to free speech and privacy. We do not want to see continental-style privacy laws creeping through the back door, and we have seen some evidence of that of late. We want to make sure that the tradition of openness, transparency and accountability is preserved, and the Bill of Rights is explicit on this at various points.

Other countries may disagree. There is a pluralism on human rights that is often lost in debate, but our tradition is to preserve freedom of speech because it is the liberty that guards all the other freedoms we cherish.

**Stephen Farry** (North Down) (Alliance): I do not think the Justice Secretary has fully thought through the implications for mutual extradition arrangements across Europe, including those under the trade and co-operation agreement. It is important to stress that the Good Friday agreement applies the full effect of the convention, not the convention in name only. Does he

understand that confidence in the new policing and criminal justice arrangements in Northern Ireland, including on legacy cases, is very heavily predicated on full adherence to the European convention?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, which is why I hope I can squarely give him the reassurance that we are not only remaining a state party to the convention but that it is properly enshrined in the Bill of Rights. That ought to answer all the consequential questions he raises.

**Tom Hunt** (Ipswich) (Con): From what I can see, this very focused intervention is about making it easier to kick out rapists and people who have broken the law and to stop people arriving here illegally. The elephant in the room is border control, which the people of this country have repeatedly voted for and is bitterly opposed by the Opposition, whatever they say.

Does the Lord Chancellor agree that the Bill of Rights is so important because it will enable us to control our borders and deliver the Rwanda policy, and that it should be expedited? I do not mind doing all-nighters, and I do not mind staying up until 2 am. I think most people in this country who want border control would want this Bill of Rights because they can see how it links to that.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I share my hon. Friend's restlessness to proceed with all due speed, because we have been talking about this for a long time. I wrote about it in a book in 2009, and it was in our 2010 manifesto. The consultation process is important, and we had a 12-week consultation on the consultation document, which included clauses. We are publishing it now, but there will be space for further scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the Justice Committee and others, including Lords Committees. It is important to garner cross-party support to ensure we have the scrutiny that will make our reform more robust when it enters into force.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Justice Secretary wrote recently that all

"UK citizens should be able to enjoy the same essential protections."

I return to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin). Will all the human rights that the Justice Secretary wishes to cover in his Bill apply to all people in the UK or only to UK citizens? Should not human rights apply to everyone?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I will give the hon. Lady an illustration. We have an international obligation not to make people stateless, so I do not think UK citizens are in precisely the same legal position as a foreign national offender. I think most people think we should have freedom under the rule of law and that we should be consistent in applying the law, but that people who have been welcomed to this country should come here through lawful routes and that people who commit serious crimes in this country should be removed. That is common sense, and I think the people of Scotland will not understand how hon. Members who purport to represent them can stand in the way of such a common-sense measure.



**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): I am reassured by the intentions behind this Bill of Rights, and by two things above all: by the Justice Secretary's absolute commitment that we will remain party to the European convention on human rights, and by what the former Supreme Court judge Lord Sumption wrote at the weekend:

"modifying its operation here need not mean abrogating human rights. We can have all or any of the rights in the convention under ordinary domestic legislation".

However, will my right hon. Friend help me to understand why he is proposing not to apply interim measures on courts in the UK and make them non-binding, because surely this would be a breach of international law, and would it not be better instead to focus on winning an appeal against any interim measure that the Government do not agree with?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is always sensible and judicious about these matters. On interim orders, he may recall that rule 39—which is the basis—is a rule of procedure of the Strasbourg Court, it is not part of the convention and the rules of procedure are supposed to govern only the internal workings of the Strasbourg Court. Indeed, that is not just my view—it was the Strasbourg Court's view until 2005. It is not right that a judicial institution abrogates a power, whether at home or abroad, that has to be given to it by the legislators of state parties or Members of Parliament here. Therefore, we will be clear about the impact on the UK courts and under UK law. The Bill of Rights is right to address that squarely. It is a good example of the creeping, shifting goalposts, which are contrary to any democratic oversight, and that is important. Finally on that point, I want to be careful not to impinge on matters subject to legal proceedings, but, as a matter of principle, it cannot be right that the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court address these issues and see no realistic risk to those being removed, but have that trumped by the Strasbourg Court on a vague basis.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Could the Deputy Prime Minister look this way now and again? That would be helpful. If not, it is hard to hear him.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Two things do not surprise me today: the continuing utter disrespect shown to you, Mr Speaker, as Chair of this House, and the utter dearth of historical knowledge on the Government Front Bench and among their Back Benchers. I remind them that there is no such thing as UK law. There is the law of England and Wales, the law of Northern Ireland and the law of Scotland. On the point the Deputy Prime Minister made, I wonder whether, in his next discussion with the Justice Minister of Ukraine, which is a signatory to the convention and a defender of the convention against the Russian Federation, he will say which parts of the convention he thinks Ukraine should leave.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** May I give the hon. Member some reassurance? First, the Human Rights Act is a protected enactment and a precise example of UK-wide application. I have met the Justice Minister of Ukraine, and I will tell the hon. Member what he said. He said "Thank you" from the bottom of his heart for everything that this country has done on sanctions, for

our support for Ukraine's military and for the role that we are playing, alongside the Attorney General, in supporting the International Criminal Court prosecution and investigations on the ground in Ukraine to hold the commission of war crimes in Ukraine and hold those responsible to account.

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): My constituent Mr Lindop, who is trying to recover his kidnapped children from Poland, will be one of many who will be pleased to hear the Government's continued determination to uphold these international standards.

When I visited the European Court of Human Rights last week, I heard from the UK judge, who was interviewed for his post by Members of this House, that the UK continues to have the lowest number of cases per capita referred to the Court and the lowest number of cases per capita to go against it of any country that is a member of the convention, and that our commitment to upholding the rule of law provides enormous moral authority for our international leadership role. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend confirm once again that, with this new Bill of Rights, the UK will continue to uphold the highest possible standards of human rights and continue to be an example to other member states?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for the way in which he expressed and articulated his point. He is absolutely right. People talk about the UK's record and, of course, we have one of the highest levels of compliance with the ECHR compared with many of our European friends and partners. However, rarely but on occasion, there will be moments of mission creep where the goalposts shift. Prisoner voting was an example where we said, "Actually, that is not something that Parliament would accept." I was the Justice Minister in 2015 who went to the Committee of Ministers and said, "We believe in staying in the European convention, but we feel that the ruling is wrong on principle. We are not going to give prisoners the vote." We will maintain our high standards of compliance, but when it comes down to it, the final word must stay with this House on critical issues of national importance.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement today. At present, for many Christians, the UK courts have dealt more harshly with cases such as that of wearing a cross in work than the rulings of Strasbourg. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the right to have a religion and freedom to live our belief, inasmuch as it is not harmful to others, will be protected in the Bill of Rights, and our right to speak the name of Jesus and respectfully preach the gospel will be upheld?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is right. He alludes to the harm to others principle and the great John Stuart Mill tradition of liberty in this country, and that is precisely what has infused the Bill of Rights. I think he will see the principles that he has articulated reflected in the Bill of Rights, and I look forward to continuing to discuss the details with him over the weeks and months to follow.

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I was one of those who shared the frustrations of my constituents in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke when we

[Jonathan Gullis]

saw the Rwanda flight grounded and the deportation of foreign national offenders frustrated, which is why I was one of those who openly said that we should withdraw from the European convention on human rights. However, having engaged with my right hon. Friend, and I am very grateful for his time, I am satisfied wholeheartedly that this Bill of Rights and reform of the interpretation of the European convention on human rights with our UK Supreme Court is the appropriate way to go. I am happy to cede, therefore, that on this argument I was wrong—something that I know does not happen in this place very often. So can I get reassurances from my right hon. Friend at the Dispatch Box for the people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke that this Bill of Rights will help the deportation of foreign national offenders and illegal economic migrants who come from safe mainland Europe?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I think that was an almost unprecedented intervention, but wholeheartedly welcome. My hon. Friend fights very tenaciously, but he also engages very forensically. I can give him the reassurances. I think the right thing to do is for us to discuss the Bill of Rights, the particular provisions and how they will apply, but certainly in relation to rule 39 interim orders, it is squarely addressed in the Bill of Rights.

**Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): We all support human rights, but my right hon. Friend will agree that human rights have been given a bad name in the past by cases brought by people, often offenders, who have shown absolutely no regard for the rights of others. Rights go along with responsibilities, so could my right hon. Friend set out how the Bill of Rights will make sure the courts address responsibilities as well as rights?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** One of the ways in which the courts can do that is to make sure—for example, when it comes to compensation—that, where someone has done harm or contributed to their own harm while claiming breaches of human rights, that is something the judges can take into account at the remedy stage. Of course, that is a principle of law in this country already. We often say—I remember studying law as a graduate—that there is a principle that those who come to equity must come with clean hands. It must be right, it must be consistent and I think for many people it is just common sense that we apply that principle in the context of human rights claims.

**Mrs Natalie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): Over 11,000 people have made the dangerous cross-channel journey this year alone, and it is undoubtedly the case that the decision of the European Court of Human Rights that led to the grounding of the Rwanda flight has raised considerable concerns in my constituency of Dover and Deal that it will simply encourage the people traffickers—people who have no respect for the rights of others, including to human life, or the laws of our land. So can my right hon. Friend expand on how this Bill of Rights will ensure that there is not such overreach by the European Court of Human Rights in future?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I think many people, but I suspect particularly my hon. Friend's constituents, will think the real threat to human rights is allowing,

and not cracking down on, this trade in human misery. She asked about how we will reform the relationship with the Strasbourg Court. First, it will be by freeing the UK courts to diverge from Strasbourg case law, and being clear that they do not need to take it into account. Secondly, it will be by making sure, in the way I have already articulated, that there is the equivalent of a democratic shield, as we relied on in relation to prisoner voting, but reinforced and made clearer, so that when it comes to the shifting goalposts, whether under judicial interpretation at home or abroad, Parliament has the last word. Finally, it will be in relation to rule 39 interim orders, and she will find all those expressly and explicitly addressed in the Bill of Rights.

**Danny Kruger** (Devizes) (Con): There has been much talk of Winston Churchill and the authorship of the original convention by British Conservative judges. The fact is that the text of the original convention is absolutely fine, and it is the application and extension of the convention's original meaning by Strasbourg judges over the decades since that is the problem. I therefore very much welcome the commitment to raise the bar for article 8 judgments.

I also welcome the commitment to give UK judges the right to diverge from Strasbourg case law. My concern, however, is that some UK judges do not want to diverge from Strasbourg case law. In fact, in some cases they want to go further; I think of Baroness Hale, of blessed memory to Members here. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that we will genuinely be free of Strasbourg case law, and is it worth thinking about strengthening the obligation on judges to disregard Strasbourg cases that do not apply in our context?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** First, if my hon. Friend reads clause 3 of the Bill of Rights, I think he will find that all his concerns are addressed squarely and fully; I urge him to have a look and come back to me.

My hon. Friend made another important point about people talking as if the European convention was the exclusive authorship of Churchill and the United Kingdom. That is a perverse and neo-imperial reading of history that is totally at odds with the way in which the European convention was negotiated, which was by a mixture of European countries, including the UK—we were centrally involved—and other countries with a civil law background. The convention reflects a mix of those traditions. As a result, it is unobjectionable, but the challenge has come in relation to interpretation and application. My hon. Friend's points are valid, but the idea that the convention was a British creation is almost neo-imperial myth making.

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): People in Stoke-on-Trent are sick and tired of human rights laws being abused by serious criminals and illegal migrants. Will my right hon. Friend confirm to my constituents in Stoke-on-Trent South that the British Bill of Rights will restore the authority of this House and British courts?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I can give my hon. Friend and his constituents precisely that assurance. The Bill is not anti-human rights. We are strengthening our tradition of freedom, including freedom of speech. It is pro judges; we want our Supreme Court to have the last word on the law of the land, when it is interpreted. It is also pro democracy, and that is the bit missing from the

other side's critique. We believe that, when the goalposts shift, it is elected Members—accountable to his, my and everyone's constituents—who must have the last word on the law of the land.

**Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): The residents of Blackpool were absolutely furious at the European Court's move to block the first removal flight to Rwanda last week. They desperately want that policy to work and will warmly welcome the measures outlined by the Deputy Prime Minister today. What assurances can he give them that the reforms will allow our relocations policy to be a success?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** There is no silver bullet that can solve that issue and the small boats issue. Even pulling out of the European convention will not provide a silver bullet. However, I can reassure my hon. Friend—I am happy to talk him through this—that, when it comes to deportation of foreign national offenders or public interest in removals more generally, there will be respect and greater deference to primary legislation passed by this House. In addition, our approach to rule 39 interim orders will mean that we can give him and his constituents the assurances they need.

**James Daly** (Bury North) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. It is rather curious that he is being criticised for acting on the democratic mandate given to him by millions of our fellow citizens who voted on our manifesto. Millions voted, in both the Brexit referendum and the general election in 2019, for control of our borders and to prevent illegal immigration. It is the job of courts to interpret the will of Parliament, not to invent law themselves. Therefore, the Bill of Rights will not only protect the fundamental rights that we all enjoy; it will give the democratic voice of the British people a role in the decision-making process.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In a democracy, we command, rule and govern by consent. We are at risk of losing public confidence in our immigration controls if we cannot take the common-sense measures that they expect. We are also at risk of losing public confidence in human rights if we do not restore a healthy dose of common sense.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. We now move on to the statement from the Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency.

## EU Retained Law

1.44 pm

**The Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg):** With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement about EU retained law.

Earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out that:

“The United Kingdom's uncoupling from the rules, regulations and institutions of Brussels was never simply about the moment of our departure; the act of Brexit was not an end in itself but the means by which our country will achieve great things.”

Now that we have left the European Union the sovereignty of Parliament has been restored and we are free once again to legislate, regulate, or deregulate as this sovereign Parliament *redux* pleases. As we maximise the benefits of Brexit and transform the UK into the most sensibly regulated economy in the world, we must reform the EU law we have retained on our statute book. Only through reform of this retained EU law will we finally be able to untangle ourselves from nearly 50 years of EU membership.

In September 2021 my predecessor the noble Lord Frost announced a review into the substance of retained EU law. The purpose of the review was to catalogue which Departments, policy areas and sectors of the economy are most saturated by European law—law that was imposed upon us in a time when Parliament was unable to refuse consent. The road to reform remains a long one; not all Brexit freedoms can be grasped at once. I am pleased to report that Whitehall fired on all cylinders to complete this review. As a result, Members across the House can properly appreciate the extent of EU law on our statute book and the extent of the opportunities that reforming this law provides.

In the 2022 “The Benefits of Brexit” announcement, the Prime Minister committed to making the outcome of this review available to the public. It is right that the public know how much retained EU law there is and that they should be able to hold the Government properly to account for reforming it. The public have already shown great interest in the EU law that remains on our statute book, as evidenced by the huge amount of correspondence I received in response to my request for details of EU legislation that still burden them—and I am grateful to readers of *The Sun* and the *Sunday Express* for their many replies. I am also encouraging some competitiveness between my right hon. Friends in the Cabinet, and hope that this spirit will inspire rapid reform, with returns published every quarter by Departments.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce that today we publish an authoritative catalogue of over 2,400 pieces of legislation, spanning over 300 individual policy areas. This catalogue will be available on gov.uk through an interactive dashboard. It will be updated on a quarterly basis so the public can “count down” retained EU law as the Government reform it. I commend the Cabinet Office officials who developed this dashboard; it is a fascinating resource in its own right, and is of both political and—in my view—historic constitutional importance.

The pertinence of publishing the dashboard today should not be missed. Six years ago tomorrow—that day of legend and song—the United Kingdom voted



[*Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg*]

decisively to leave the European Union. The public voted to take back control, and while it took some time to get there—two general elections and some constitutionally fascinating parliamentary prestidigitation between 2017 and 2019—the Prime Minister has delivered such control in spades. His Brexit agreement, which guaranteed regulatory autonomy for Britain, means that the publication of this dashboard offers the public a real opportunity: everything on it we can now change.

The author E. M. Forster once said

“two cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety, and two because it permits criticism.”

Therefore, as I did earlier this year, I am inviting the public from across the country—whether in Wakefield or in Tiverton and Honiton, or in other places selected at random for the purposes of illustration—to once again share their ideas of reform and to look further into pieces of retained EU law that have an impact on their lives. By using this dashboard, the public can join us on this journey to amend, repeal or replace retained EU law. Together we will make reforms that will create a crucial boost to productivity and help us bring the benefits of growth to the whole country.

Of course, Her Majesty’s Government are legislating to seize the opportunities of Brexit and have been since 2020. From introducing our points-based immigration system and securing the integrity of the United Kingdom’s internal market to boosting growth and innovation by allowing gene-edited crops and recognising high-quality professional qualifications, we are already showing—among others—the benefits of Brexit to the British people.

There are countless other opportunities for reform ahead of us. Members will know that the recent Queen’s Speech was full to the gunwales with the opportunities of Brexit, ranging from financial services to agriculture, data and artificial intelligence, transport, energy, and restoring sense to human rights law. This Government will work to develop a new pro-growth, high-standards regulatory framework that will give business the confidence to innovate, invest, and create jobs.

Those are the big, headline-grabbing issues, but the dashboard is, I hope, an opportunity to tackle hundreds of matters. They may seem marginal on their own, but all these measures in the margin will combine to usher in a revolution: not a French-style revolution with blood running in the streets and the terror of the guillotine, but a British-style revolution whereby marginal improvements move inch by inch so that soon we will have covered the feet, and the feet will become yards, and the yards will become chains and then furlongs and miles, until the journey is complete. With inflation running high, we need to search everywhere—under every stone and sofa cushion—for supply-side reforms that will make products and services cheaper, will make things easier for business, and, ultimately, will grow the economy and cut the cost of living.

The dashboard, therefore, is the supply-side reformer’s El Dorado, and, naturally, I am pointing to the treasure trove of opportunity that this publication represents. It highlights unnecessary and disproportionate EU regulations on consumer goods, such as those regulating the power of vacuum cleaners—why should that trouble Her Majesty’s

Government?—and the expensive testing requirements mandated by REACH—the regulation on the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—for the plastics that make up items we use every day, requirements that shut out the newest and most innovative materials. Thankfully, we left the EU before it decided to mandate what sort of phone chargers we can have, a typically short-termist and anti-innovation measure which will only have a long-term negative effect for consumers.

The dashboard includes the overbearing reporting requirements which add costs to businesses and slow down progress, whether by building new developments in areas that need housing the most or by making it more expensive to hire people at a time of a labour shortage and to respond to militant strikers. We will continue to work with Departments to cut at least £1 billion of business costs from EU red tape to secure greater freedoms and productivity. Ensuring that we have the right regulation is crucial. Excessive and unnecessary regulations which burden business or distort market outcomes, reduce productivity, pushing up prices and negatively affecting everyone’s cost of living. Using our new-found freedom to address the over 2,400 retained EU pieces of legislation on our statute book, the Government will be able to remove and amend regulation that is not right for the UK. This will make a real difference to the process of reducing the number of unnecessary EU regulations that contribute to the cost of living.

Some—perhaps dozens—of these rules we might wish to maintain. That will be a decision for the Queen in Parliament, our Parliament, rather than the European Commission. We will preserve retained EU law that is required for our international obligations. We will preserve high standards, such as those for water, and we may even be able to go further in some ways to move ahead of the European Union.

The publication of this dashboard will mark a pivotal step towards reform of our statute book and those 2,400 pieces of retained EU legislation, ahead of the introduction of the “Brexit Freedoms” Bill. That Bill will allow the United Kingdom to take the next step in reclaiming the sovereignty of Parliament. It will address the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which preserved and incorporated too much EU-derived law at too high a status, giving much of it the same status as an Act of Parliament. That is clearly mistaken, and means that many changes to retained EU law require primary legislation.

Undoing this vandalism to our constitutional order policy area by policy area would dominate the legislative agenda for Parliaments to come, which would affect the Government’s ability to deliver more fundamental domestic reforms and the opportunity for the UK to reap the benefits of Brexit. The “Brexit Freedoms” Bill will create a targeted power to allow retained EU law to be amended in a more sustainable way, and will go with the grain of the British constitution. This will help us to deliver the UK’s regulatory, economic and legal priorities.

Ahead of the Bill’s introduction, I invite Members to review the dashboard themselves, and to delve into the legislation that affects the communities that they serve.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the shadow Minister.

1.54 pm

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for advance sight of his statement.

This appears to be simply a vanity project. It is quite extraordinary that on a day when inflation has topped 9%, when the cost of energy is soaring, when families are facing massive pressures and wondering how they will put food on the table, and when prices are rising at the fastest rate in 40 years, the Government's offer to the British people is a digital filing cabinet of existing legislation that the right hon. Gentleman describes as "marginal"—his own word.

While the Government plan to cut 20% of civil servants, the Minister for so-called Government efficiency is running his own make-work scheme in the Cabinet Office, creating tasks for it to satisfy his own obsessions. How much has this exercise cost the taxpayer? How many civil service hours? Perhaps we could have a running meter counting them up on the dashboard so that we all know. What is the expected number of users among the general public? Is the dashboard even active? I am an eager beaver, but I could not find it on gov.uk this morning.

The reality is that gimmicks do nothing to address the real challenges that the public face today. For all the Government's talk about changes that we can make outside the EU, they still refuse to make the one concrete change that the Labour party has demanded for months, with the overwhelming support of the British people, and the Prime Minister himself has promised: the removal of VAT on home energy bills.

Other changes that are now possible post Brexit and which Labour has called for but the Government have refused include a ban on the import of fur; the imposition of VAT on private school fees to fund a transformation in the provision of mental health; and the introduction of US-style bans on the import of goods from China produced using slave labour. Those are all changes that the Government could make right now, but they were not mentioned in the right hon. Gentleman's lengthy oration.

As for the regulatory changes that the Government propose, I have not heard a single example today of a specific change that depends on the passage of the planned Brexit freedoms Bill, nor have we heard an example of additional changes that will follow in due course as a result of that Bill. What is that Bill for? In the absence of any answers, it is only right that we are cautious about what the new legislation will mean and whether it could be used as a mechanism to fast-track changes that could, for example, impinge on the devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, threaten workers' rights or threaten the environmental protections and food standards that the British people were repeatedly promised would be maintained post Brexit.

It is also vital that we ensure that any changes proposed under the legislation are subject to the proper processes for scrutiny, consultation and impact assessment. Anyone in doubt about why that is necessary need only look at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's proposals, included in the paper "The Benefits of Brexit", to ditch the UK's current data protection standards. That one move, which has been confirmed in recent

weeks, would jeopardise tens of billions of UK exports that depend on the ability to sell services online to EU customers quickly and easily. However, there has been no mention whatever of that threat, let alone a full assessment of its impact, and it did not feature today. That is all further evidence of a Government entirely driven by rhetoric and increasingly detached from reality.

Could it be that the dashboard is designed not only to satisfy the right hon. Gentleman's obsessions, but to distract members of the public from the Government's shambolic handling of the Northern Ireland protocol? All this self-congratulation comes from a Government who are now trying to convince people that what they described as their flagship achievement was not a negotiating triumph, but a deal so flawed that they cannot abide by it. Not only is their Northern Ireland Protocol Bill a blatant breach of international law, but it risks the integrity of the Good Friday agreement, risks causing divides across Europe when we should be pulling together against Putin's war on the continent, and risks causing trade barriers in a cost of living crisis. We need negotiation, graft and statecraft, not unilateral action or gimmicks.

Those are just some of the very real and serious problems that will affect the lives of ordinary people in the UK and beyond for years to come. The dashboard that the right hon. Gentleman described will provide little comfort. A Labour Government would make Brexit work by unleashing the potential of British businesses and entrepreneurs so that we can lead the world in new industries. We would seize the opportunities of the climate transition to create well-paid, secure jobs in all parts of the country. Rather than pursuing vanity projects, the Government should focus on the real problems facing the British public.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to thank me for an advance copy of my statement; it is a pity, then, that he did not read it, because so many of his questions were answered there. He wants to know what the purpose is—the purpose is supply-side reforms that are essential for dealing with the cost of living crisis. [*Interruption.*] He quotes "marginal", so he did pay attention to one thing, but he then wrenched it out of context to use it in a way that shows he was not following the argument. Each individual item is marginal, but cumulatively they are fundamental. That is how we have supply side reforms.

There are endless obstacles in the way of doing business—hundreds and thousands of them—and our job is to find them, expose them and remove them and to have a Bill that makes that simple. If you had to have primary legislation to remove every stone from your shoe, Madam Deputy Speaker—no doubt they are very elegant shoes that no stone would dare enter, but nonetheless, should a stone enter and we needed primary legislation to remove it, that brave stone would remain there almost permanently. What we are doing is speeding up the process so that stones may be removed from shoes.

Then the socialists complain that the agreement was not up to scratch. Bear in mind that at that point the Labour party still did not want to leave the European Union. It was still arguing about things such as a second referendum. Labour Members did not want to follow what the British people had voted for, and now they want slavish acceptance of EU laws. Have we not

[*Mr Rees-Mogg*]

had a socialist recently calling for the single market to be where we should end up again? That is where they want to be: under the yoke of Brussels, ignoring the referendum and the will of the British people.

The hon. Gentleman also thought that this dashboard should be released before my statement to Parliament. Some people may remember that I used to be Leader of the House, and in that role I was regularly hearing from Mr Speaker about information being given out before it had come to the Floor of the House. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) nodding—he would be the first to raise a point of order.

I am glad that there are a few socialists in today, rather than being on picket lines. It might be that when they are on their picket lines, they could read a bit of “Erskine May” and the Standing Orders of this place to understand that things are meant to be announced here first, which is what we are doing.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on having made this statement? It is quite right that we need to get on with this. To those who complain about not having absolutely everything done now on the Floor of the House by primary legislation, I say that so many of these rules and regulations were imported without so much as a single element being dealt with on the Floor of the House, so we need to ensure we get this in balance.

Can I press my right hon. Friend on general data protection regulation rules? One of the problems we have is that many charities, small businesses and start-ups face real cost problems and regulatory detail problems that they cannot cope with, and they have cried out for changes to be made. Will he confirm to me that this is one of the areas that the Government will look at to make sure that those charities, companies and individuals do not face anything like the terrible bureaucratic mess that is the regulations today?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My right hon. Friend makes two very good points. The first is that it is important to note that most of these laws came in using the section 2(2) power under the European Communities Act 1972. The vast majority were not subject to a parliamentary process, despite the diligence of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee. When we asked for debates on the Floor of the House in that Committee, they were often not given, and the debates that were held in Committee could not refuse or block a European law—even the ports directive, which everyone was united against. This great flood of regulations came in without so much as a by-your-leave from this House, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) is right to point that out.

My right hon. Friend makes a good point on GDPR, and it is worth bearing in mind that Australia has a general exemption from GDPR for smaller businesses. Whether we can go that far, I do not know, but I will certainly take his point up with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

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

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I know that the Minister speaks with passion as a Brexiteer, as I speak with passion as a remainer—at least we can both have conviction in our belief, unlike those who have slightly changed their minds. As I listened to his statement, replete with the usual—forgive me—flim-flam about Brexit Britain being liberated from the European yoke, I found myself wondering whether he really believes that this Palace is the only place capable of promulgating rights and laws. From listening to him speak, and from what we know about the Brexit freedoms Bill, it is almost as if those on the Government side have forgotten that there are other legislatures across these islands that have a role in making laws and that may wish to express an opinion on whether the laws and rights that we accumulated during our membership of the European Union should be snatched away by whatever whimsy this Government are attracted to in a given week.

Given that Scotland’s governance and destiny cannot be decided without the sovereign will and consent of the people of Scotland, not this place—this Government continue to ignore us at their peril—could the Minister tell us whether the Government will seek a legislative consent motion from Pàrlamaid na h-Alba, and from other devolved legislatures, and if so, whether they intend to respect the decisions of those Parliaments? We need to ask the question: do we actually live in a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, or in a greater England, where the wishes of only one of the constituent nations need to be respected in order for such Bills to be carried?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman that he and I have been consistent in our views on this matter, and therefore it is interesting, as always, to cross swords with him. He brings us to an important issue, because obviously where there are devolved consequences from laws coming back from the European Union, the power to amend will be with the devolved authorities. We have already seen a great flow of power from Brussels to the devolved Administrations so that the Scottish Government have received powers. The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 provided a great swathe of extra powers to the devolved authorities, and that will continue under this Bill and will provide benefits for all the devolved authorities to take back control for themselves. We will indeed ask for legislative consent motions, which is the habit of this Government. I cannot promise whether they will be granted; in that instance, he will be more influence than me.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the enormous progress he is making with respect to the freedoms Bill, and the opportunities that it will give the United Kingdom to regain its sovereignty, its self-government and its democracy? Does he agree, given his experience and having been a member of the European Scrutiny Committee for many years, that one of the most extraordinary aspects of EU retained law is that for about 50 years the laws were made by majority vote in the Council of Ministers—Ministers of other countries—behind closed doors and without even so much as a transcript, unlike in this House, so people did not even know the basis, let alone who had actually voted for them? Does he not regard that as so extraordinary that he would be surprised if



anyone could possibly justify legislating for a country in that way, and particularly for a country such as the United Kingdom, with its freedom and democracy? It is completely unacceptable for it to have continued for so long?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the way legislation was made in Europe was entirely undemocratic. It was unscrutinised and then became our law automatically, and if we did not turn it into our law properly, we could be told to jump to by the European Court of Justice. The situation was entirely unsatisfactory. However, because we are a democracy and we believe in the rights of Parliament, we are ensuring that the process of reversing that is done in a proper parliamentary manner, and I hope that he will play his part in that manner.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): It was widely reported that the right hon. Gentleman wanted to introduce a sunset clause under which all EU retained law would disappear after four years unless Government Departments had decided that they wanted to keep it. However, having listened carefully to his statement, it seems to me that he has suffered a defeat at the hands of his Cabinet colleagues—we should pay tribute to the Environment Secretary, who I think described that approach as “messaging around”. If the right hon. Gentleman is serious about trying to remove constraints on businesses, what is he going to do about the barrel-load of red tape, cost and bureaucracy that has fallen on British businesses since the beginning of 2021 when they are trying to export to the EU? That has had a huge impact, especially on small businesses, some of which have just given up trying to sell goods to Europe.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman is talking about sunsets. I think I once called him the high priest of remain. Yesterday, there was a marvellous picture of the latest sunset over Stonehenge, where those who like the sunsets coming late had all gathered to celebrate the longest day. I am surprised that the high priest of remain was not there joining in on the celebration.

On the right hon. Gentleman's question, he will have to wait and see what the Bill has to say about that. He mentioned EU regulation. This great lover of EU regulation does not realise where the blame lies. The EU runs a fundamentally anti-competitive closed market, which was affecting us. It was making goods and services in this country more expensive because we could not trade freely with the world. Now the EU is applying its regulations to us—that is what we are getting out of. That is the economic opportunity: to be free from all of that which slowly strangles the European economy and to have an economy that can grow globally.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for all that he is doing to advance UK prosperity and growth, including this Bill. The common fisheries policy sunk many of our fishing boats. Can we have a policy to replace that fleet? The EU policy ripped up many of our orchards with grants. Can we have some UK money and a policy to replant our trees? The EU imposed VAT on us and has left us with a burden on our energy. Now surely is the time to use our freedoms and cut VAT.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My right hon. Friend is right: it is one of our freedoms. In his spring statement, the Chancellor announced some amelioration of VAT. I will ensure that my right hon. Friend's suggestion is passed on to the Chancellor.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): As someone who supported Brexit, I welcome the statement today and the fact that the Government are going to monitor and identify ways in which we can make our economy more dynamic, more innovative and more competitive. But as a Unionist, I have concerns about the statement. The regulatory freedom that is being sought cannot apply to many aspects of law in Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland will still remain under the dead hand of EU regulation, which will smother innovation and entrepreneurial dynamism. Will the Minister give an assurance that, in order for the freedoms that he is announcing today to apply to the whole of the United Kingdom, the Government will make every effort and take every step to remove the dead hand of the protocol?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman and share a lot of his views on this matter. It is fundamental that the benefits of leaving the European Union are for the whole of the United Kingdom. I am pleased with the Bill that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has introduced, and I hope that it will go towards ameliorating the problems that have arisen. Our single united country cannot be ruled by the dead hand of the Brussels bureaucracy, as we voted to leave as a single nation.

**Angela Richardson** (Guildford) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that it remains a priority for this Government to use our newfound Brexit freedoms to develop a pro-growth, high standards regulatory framework that gives businesses such as mine in Guildford the confidence to innovate and invest?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What we need is regulations that work rather than ones that require a lot of form filling. The Procurement Bill has been introduced in the other place, and that will replace 350 EU regulations with one British law. That is what we must be aiming at. We are not moving to the wild west. We are not going to have no regulation. However, our regulation must be understandable, simple to effect and accountable to this House. The best check on regulation is Members of this House coming forward and saying, “I seek redress of grievance for my constituent who is being harmed by this regulation.” The Minister at the Dispatch Box is then put on the spot and has to go back to his or her office and ask, “Why are we doing this to the Great British people?” That is how our democracy works, and that is how we must make regulation work.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is right that it makes a refreshing change from the practice of his colleagues that he came to this House first to tell us about the dashboard, but he might have tried to see whether it works on a mobile phone, because it does not. I know that he is not a fan of being able to simply charge one, but he might accept that most of the British public who want to use the dashboard will have one. No matter—with some assistance, I have been able

[Stella Creasy]

to log on to the dashboard and I can see that on the list of items that he has put up for grabs are the length of maternity leave and the duty to pay statutory maternity pay. He said in his statement that everything on the dashboard “can now change”. Will he assure the thousands of women in this country who rely on the protections of maternity leave and maternity pay that they will not change? If so, what is the point of this? If not, will he be honest that it is really about reinventing the Beecroft reforms?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The dashboard worked perfectly well on an iPad, so I would have thought that it was not beyond the wit of Members of this House to get it to work. In many cases, the protections that we have in employment law in this country predate the European Union or we are ahead of the European Union. That is true of maternity rights, where we are ahead of the base rights in the European Union under our own law. To say, “Are we going to repeal bits that are not even EU law, but domestic law?” is missing the point of the statement.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Over a long time in this House, I have noticed that when the Government have done something well, the number of Opposition Back Benchers present for a statement is very few. I spy no Liberal Democrats at all—DUP Members are here, of course—and just four Labour Back Benchers were here at the start of the statement. They do not want to be here to listen to Brexit opportunities and the savings and benefits to this country. The able Minister said that there will be quarterly reporting, which I hope he will come to the House to do. Will he publicise that in advance, so that Liberal Democrats and Labour Members will know not to attend?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his wise and witty suggestion.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): The Minister mentioned in his statement that he hopes that today’s proposals will reduce the cost of living, but is it not the case that the British Government’s post-Brexit policy is leading to reduced investor confidence and weakening the currency, which further fuels inflation? Would not a responsible Government, given the serious problems faced by households across the UK, stop shredding European regulations and rejoin the single market?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** No. The hon. Gentleman knows that I will not agree with that suggestion, because it would negate the referendum where a majority of people in Wales voted in favour of leaving, as did the majority of people in England. This is about reducing costs and taking burdens off. The single market is an extraordinarily regulatory organisation that boosts the costs of services and manufactured goods. To go back into it would make life more expensive and make things worse for British consumers.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and say how much I welcome the publication of the dashboard, because it no doubt provides a revealing snapshot of the extent to which the body of United Kingdom law

has been infiltrated by frequently undemocratically formulated EU law. I echo the words of the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson): the big exception is Northern Ireland, which is continuing to receive a stream of laws because of the Northern Ireland protocol. I urge the Government to press ahead with the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, which is urgently needed.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** This is beginning to sound like business questions. I will make sure that his request is passed on to my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): Small and medium-sized enterprises are the backbone of the British economy: they drive forward innovation and they create jobs, but they do not have huge departments to help them with the mountain of red tape that is suffocating them because of the Government’s botched Brexit. Can the Minister set out specifically what his plan is to reduce that mountain of red tape so that those SMEs can be supported rather than crushed by the form of Brexit that he supports?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The retained EU law Bill.

**Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): Is it my right hon. Friend’s view that most of the bureaucracy placed on British businesses that are trying to export comes from the requirements made by other EU countries? They seem to be making it a lot harder for us to export to them than we are making it for them to export to us.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because that is a very important point. Free trade benefits the receiver of free trade. Just because the EU makes it harder for us to export to it is no reason to retaliate in kind. All that does is make things more expensive for our consumers and our businesses. That is why, on 1 July, we will not impose the full set of controls that the EU imposes on us. We are looking to a single trade window by the end of 2023, which will lower the barriers to trade from around the world and improve the fluidity of our borders. Why? Because that benefits our economy, even if we do it unilaterally, and that is fundamentally important. The EU has never understood that, and it is why it is such a high-cost area.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I thank the right hon. Member for the statement. I am a member of the European Scrutiny Committee, to which he gave evidence on this subject a couple of months ago. The Treasury has announced reforms to the Consumer Credit Act 1974 as part of this package. In the current economic climate, it is imperative that vulnerable consumers be adequately protected, particularly when it comes to credit agreements. Will the Minister confirm how the Government expect to ensure full consultation with traditionally hard-to-reach groups?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I do not know if the hon. Lady will particularly want a compliment from me, but she is one of the most assiduous attenders in this House. She fights for constituents who face difficulties, holds Ministers to account, and ensures that people’s concerns are brought to this House, and while I may not agree with her overarching political philosophy, that is what we Members of Parliament are here to do. We are the

champions of hard-to-reach people; we hold Governments to account; and we ensure that the result is included in Bills as they make their way through Parliament. The hon. Lady, dare I say it, is a model of how this can be done.

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for giving a summary masterclass, in his usual way, of what the Brexit freedoms Bill will mean. I think that the British people have not realised how we got to our legislative framework; there is primary legislation in this place, directives, regulations, and the override of the European Communities Act 1972. Nobody can be sure of the position, be they manufacturing something, providing services or doing anything else—this goes for anything that moves—because we do not have consolidated legislation that says, “These are the rules on the manufacture of paper,” for instance. That cannot be fair. Does he agree that this proposal will be a refreshing opening up of our legislative framework, so that we can make it better, more streamlined and, most importantly, accountable to this place and the British people?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Yes, indeed. Putting the information online, and opening it up to people—including, of course, to Members of Parliament—will make it much clearer where the blockages, obstructions and difficulties are for businesses. Once we know where they are from the detail of the legislative instrument, it becomes much easier to remove them.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): It is increasingly clear that the right hon. Member’s ministerial title refers to the political opportunities that the Government see in reopening Brexit wounds as often as possible. His pointless statement today ignores the wishes of the British people, who want the Government to stop banging on about Brexit and start tackling the issues that they face in their daily life. It ignores the wishes of business, although we know what the Prime Minister’s view is of business—it is summed up in a four-letter expletive. Was not the Minister’s Cabinet colleague, the Environment Secretary, right when he said that “messaging around” with retained law wastes officials’ time,

“costs businesses money and is unlikely to make much difference”?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** As it happens, my right hon. Friend the Environment Secretary has been extremely helpful in this process, so the hon. Gentleman should not believe everything he reads in second-tier publications. This is not about opening wounds. It is the Labour party that always wanted to oppose what the people had voted for. It thought its voters did not know what they were doing. It treats its electors with contempt and the results were reaped in December 2019. This is about getting the advantages from Brexit. This is about the agenda set out in the 2019 manifesto, but also in 2016 at the time of the referendum, of how we benefit from leaving the European Union. We do not now want slavishly to follow the diktats of the EU. That would be a way of losing all the advantages. This is the way of making the economy more efficient, getting supply-side reforms, and making goods and services cheaper.

**Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement. It is great that we are finally moving forward with the task of optimising conditions

here in the UK for businesses and individuals. Does he agree that this is an essential part of moving on with the process? A number of times I have had friends who might have voted to remain say to me, “What was the point of this? Show us what the point was, because we want to change things now. We actively want to change rules in the City and in agriculture.” Will he drive this forward with every effort?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. Both of us represent rural constituencies in Somerset and one of the great advantages of Brexit is taking away the red tape that ties our farmers and simplifying processes to make it easier for them to get on with the business of farming. It is not surprising that a very large number of retained EU law Acts are within the auspices of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, because that has been a primary responsibility of the European Union. We need to be able to clear away the thicket to make life easier. He is absolutely right.

**Stephen Flynn** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): They remove our businesses from a single market of 500 million people. They remove our collective right to live, work and travel across the European Union. They are delivering the slowest economic growth in the entire G20—aside from Russia, of course. And what do we get in return? We get an interactive dashboard and potentially more powerful vacuum cleaners. The right hon. Gentleman makes a compelling case for Scotland to choose a different path, does he not?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** There is a compelling case for Scotland to remain within the United Kingdom, which is what people voted for in 2014. There seems to be a remarkable short-sightedness about the length of a generation, which as I understood it was going to be the period before there was another vote. What we have done is what the British people voted for. The truth about the SNP is that whenever the people in the United Kingdom vote, they do not give the result the SNP wants, so the SNP goes off in a sulk and wants them to vote again and again and again in the hope that one day they might give the right answer. But life is not like that. We have had the referendum and it is all about proper opportunities. If the hon. Gentleman is so keen on Europe, just look at the spreads on bonds in the eurozone at the moment. Would he really want to be in an organisation that has that degree of fragility in its bond market?

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for his statement. Northern Ireland’s section on the dashboard should be incredibly simple. The Northern Ireland protocol has given the EU the final say without any elected input from Northern Ireland. I welcome the Minister’s statement today, but I would love to welcome the statement that allows Northern Ireland to operate as part of the United Kingdom in terms of our own legal place, so will he confirm the date for the withdrawal legislation, which I believe he is very eager to give but perhaps some of his colleagues are less so?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I was sorry not to see the hon. Gentleman in the Chamber earlier when we unveiled the shield to Sir Henry Wilson. I understand that he was, of course, in Westminster Hall, but it is about the only time I have ever been in this Chamber without his beady eye looking down upon me. He is, of course,



[Mr Rees-Mogg]

right. We want the benefits for the whole of the United Kingdom, as the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) said, too. This is a United Kingdom activity. The whole of the United Kingdom left the European Union and we cannot allow Northern Ireland to be a satrapy of the EU.

## BILL PRESENTED

### BILL OF RIGHTS BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Dominic Raab, supported by Secretary Brandon Lewis, Secretary Alister Jack, Secretary Simon Hart, the Attorney General and James Cartlidge, presented a Bill to reform the law relating to human rights.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 117) with explanatory notes (Bill 117—EN).*

## SOCIAL SECURITY (ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS) BILL: ALLOCATION OF TIME

*Ordered,*

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Social Security (Additional Payments) Bill:

### *Timetable*

(1)(a) Proceedings on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken at today's sitting in accordance with this Order.

(b) Proceedings on Second Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion four hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(c) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

### *Timing of proceedings and Questions to be put*

(2) When the Bill has been read a second time:

(a) it shall, despite Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills not subject to a programme order), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put;

(b) proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed while the Question is put, in accordance with Standing Order No. 52(1) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills), on any financial resolution relating to the Bill;

(c) on the conclusion of proceedings on any financial resolution relating to the Bill, proceedings on the Bill shall be resumed and the Speaker shall leave the Chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

(3)(a) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee of the whole House, the Chair shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

(b) If the Bill is reported with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

(4) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (1), the Chair or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions in the same order as they would fall to be put if this Order did not apply:

(a) any Question already proposed from the chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment, new Clause or new Schedule selected by the Chair or Speaker for separate decision;

(d) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(e) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and shall not put any other questions, other than the question on any motion described in paragraph (11)(a) of this Order.

(5) On a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chair or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(6) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (4)(d) on successive amendments moved or Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, the Chair or Speaker shall instead put a single Question in relation to those amendments or Motions.

(7) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (4)(e) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chair shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions, except that the Question shall be put separately on any Clause of or Schedule to the Bill which a Minister of the Crown has signified an intention to leave out.

### *Other proceedings*

(8) Provision may be made for the taking and bringing to a conclusion of any other proceedings on the Bill.

### *Miscellaneous*

(9) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill.

(10) Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

(11)(a) No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken, to recommit the Bill or to vary or supplement the provisions of this Order.

(b) No notice shall be required of such a Motion.

(c) Such a Motion may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(d) The Question on such a Motion shall be put forthwith; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (c) shall thereupon be resumed.

(e) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on such a Motion.

(12)(a) No dilatory Motion shall be made in relation to proceedings to which this Order applies except by a Minister of the Crown.

(b) The Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(13)(a) The start of any debate under Standing Order No. 24 (Emergency debates) to be held on a day on which the Bill has been set down to be taken as an Order of the Day shall be postponed until the conclusion of any proceedings on that day to which this Order applies.

(b) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply in respect of any such debate.

(14) Proceedings to which this Order applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(15)(a) Any private business which has been set down for consideration at a time falling after the commencement of proceedings on this Order or on the Bill on a day on which the

Bill has been set down to be taken as an Order of the Day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders or by any Order of the House, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day.

(b) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business so far as necessary for the purpose of securing that the business may be considered for a period of three hours.—(*Dr Coffey*.)

## **Social Security (Additional Payments) Bill**

*[Relevant document: e-petition 617425, “Make people on disability benefits eligible for the £650 one off payment.”]*

*Second Reading*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I must inform the House that the reasoned amendment in the name of Kirsty Blackman has not been selected.

2.30 pm

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The cost of living challenge facing many families right now is being driven by forces beyond their control. The aftershocks of covid on global supply chains, and Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, have caused a hike in prices and a spike in bills, particularly for energy costs. As a result, household budgets are being stretched further than at any time in recent memory, so just as we did during covid, the Government are stepping up at this challenging time to help families who are feeling the strain. It is because we got the big calls right that we have the fiscal firepower to take decisive and direct action to help millions of people across the country.

Although we have always been clear that the Government cannot cover every situation or solve every problem, we are providing financial support to every household to help relieve some of the pressures that people are under, and to help them cut costs across their household expenditure. Approximately four in five households—all those living in band A to band D homes—are receiving a £150 discount on their council tax, with millions already benefitting from the money landing in their bank accounts, and all households that are domestic energy customers will get £400 towards their energy bills this autumn, in the form of a grant with nothing to repay. We are, however, principally targeting help at those who need it most, helping ease the squeeze for those on low and fixed incomes, who we know spend a higher than average proportion of their income on energy.

**Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind):** There is an issue with people who live in park homes—I have a few sites in my constituency—because the energy rebate does not make it through to them. Are the Government looking at innovative ways of addressing the issues faced by those individuals and households?

**Dr Coffey:** My understanding is that the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), is aware of that particular channel. I am led to believe that a solution is being developed so that people will benefit from that cost even if they do not receive the money directly, because a lot of park home owners do not pay their energy bills directly. I know that my right hon. Friend is aware.

Returning to what we are doing to help people, we are providing a direct cost of living payment of £650—split into two payments of £326 and £324—to over 8 million families who already get help through means-tested benefits. This includes people on universal credit, income-based jobseeker’s allowance, income-related employment

[Dr Coffey]

and support allowance, income support, working tax credit, child tax credit and pension credit—both guarantee and savings credit recipients. On top of that, we are providing a £150 payment for approximately 6 million people with disabilities who are on qualifying benefits, and giving 8 million pensioner households an additional £300 alongside their winter fuel payment. Combined, that is extra support of at least £1,200 this year for the majority of households that are least able to absorb rising costs, which takes our total support package to £37 billion.

**Sir Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I just want to check one point. At the moment, about 150,000 working-age people who receive universal credit have their benefits limited by the benefit cap. Am I right to say that these additional payments are not constrained at all by the level of the benefit cap?

**Dr Coffey:** Yes, that is the case. I was planning to cover that later. For the record, I will still make that point.

Our household support fund administered through local authorities in England and the money given to devolved Administrations are further avenues for people to seek help with the cost of essentials. From October, the Government are adding an additional £500 million to the fund, extending support through the winter. That equates to an additional £421 million in England and £79 million for the devolved Administrations, and that will take total funding for this UK-wide household support to £1.5 billion.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): One group of people who receive universal credit and are in some difficulty are those who lose some of their universal credit because they received a universal credit advance for the first five weeks. Some 92,000 households in that situation in Wales are getting about £60 a month less, and that comes to a total of about £5 million being denied to them. I hope that the Secretary of State is prepared to reconsider her position on that. Obviously, that is not in the Bill, so she has taken a decision in the short term, but I press her to reconsider.

**Dr Coffey:** The hon. Gentleman is incorrect in saying that money is denied to people. The whole point of receiving an advance is that there is phasing and, instead of receiving 12 payments in a typical calendar year, 13 payments are made. We extended that recently so that people can choose whether to have 25 payments over 24 months. It is not a case of people being denied.

The Social Security (Additional Payments) Bill before the House is a short Bill of 11 clauses that gives us the powers necessary to administer payments to families on means-tested and disability benefits. As one-off new benefit payments, they will be delivered by the UK Government to eligible households right across the United Kingdom in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The timing of such payments will vary, starting with the first payment of £326 for DWP means-tested benefit claimants from 14 July. The second payment will arrive in the autumn for those eligible. Those on tax credits who do not receive DWP means-tested benefits will get each instalment later to avoid duplicate payments.

People not eligible in time for the first £326 payment because they were not getting a qualifying benefit in the month before the announcement may get the second £324 payment if they have a qualifying entitlement to a benefit in the month before the next eligibility date. We have deliberately not included the next eligibility date in the Bill to try not to change claimant behaviour. Instead, there is the power to set a date through regulations.

Those on qualifying disability benefits will get their £150 as a single payment from September. Where eligibility for any of these cost of living payments is found retrospectively—for example, someone who had applied for personal independence payment but not yet been awarded it—people will still receive that disability cost of living payment; it will just be at a later date.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): In opening, the Secretary of State alluded to the fact that 6 million disabled people would qualify for the additional disability support payment of £150. Does she acknowledge that some disabled people—particularly those in receipt of disability living allowance, PIP or attendance allowance—who no longer qualify for the warm home discount since her Government changed the rules, will lose out? In effect, they have taken away £150 through the warm home discount, and the additional £150 really does not do anything to meet the extra costs for people who have already lost out.

**Dr Coffey:** The warm home discount is not relevant to the Bill, but I understand the point. It is the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, but I do not know that the intention was—[*Interruption.*] I am trying to answer the hon. Lady's question. My understanding of the policy rationale is that because PIP is not means-tested—it is not income-based—a decision on warm home discount eligibility was made to include many more households on the basis of income rather than PIP eligibility. I am sure that she will welcome the fact that we have included £150 in this legislation.

These one-off tax repayments do not count towards the benefit cap and will not affect existing benefit awards. They will provide a budget boost for millions of the lowest-income households right across the United Kingdom.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr Coffey:** No, I will not.

This Government have supported and continue to support those most in need. I am proud of our record of lifting people out of poverty.

Anyone listening to Opposition parties could be forgiven for thinking that poverty was going up. The fact is that in 2021 there were 1.2 million fewer people in absolute poverty, before housing costs, than when we came into government in 2010. Between 2019-20 and 2020-21, every measure of poverty, whether absolute or relative, saw a reduction in poverty. In terms of statistics, on absolute poverty, our preferred measure, the number of working-age people in poverty is down by 100,000, the number of children in poverty is down by 200,000, and pensioner poverty is down by 200,000.



We know from the latest available data that for most families the best way out of poverty is through work.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Dr Coffey:** I will not take any further interventions from the hon. Gentleman, because he has already intervened. I am sure that if he wants to contribute to this debate he will have put in to speak.

In 2019-20, children in households where all adults were in work were about six times less likely to be in absolute poverty than children in a household where nobody works. That is why our economic priority during the pandemic was to protect, support and create jobs through the furlough scheme and the many other measures we took as part of our plan for jobs.

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will of course know that her figures on absolute poverty and relative poverty are disputed by the various stakeholders who work in this field. One of the issues that is concerning people with regard to poverty is the failure to uprate benefits this year along the lines of this year's levels of inflation. She has rightly said that pensions and benefits such as disability benefits and universal credit—and, hopefully, the minimum income guarantee and pension credit—will rise in line with inflation this September. She is coming under some pressure on that now. Can she give us a guarantee that she will not resile from that position?

**Dr Coffey:** The right hon. Gentleman may not be aware that I cannot make any declaration about the rises in benefits; I can only point to our policy in terms of, for example, the triple lock for pensioners. That is because I am required by law to undertake a review of the benefits once a year and I have not yet done so. I am sure that he will judge us on past performance, especially in following the regular legislation.

The unemployment rate is now below the low level we saw before the pandemic—close to the lowest since 1974—and we have more people on payrolls than ever before, but we are not resting on our laurels, particularly with a record number of vacancies in the labour market. We want people to get into work and to boost their incomes, which is why we launched the Way to Work scheme, quickly connecting claimants with employers looking to fill vacancies. Having turbo-charged jobcentres into super, almost dating, agencies in the way that they match people looking for work to people offering work, I am confident that we will achieve our target to move half a million people into jobs by the end of the month. There are hundreds of thousands more people benefiting from a pay packet, along with the prospect of a better job tomorrow and a future career.

**Mr Richard Holden** (North West Durham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the payments in this Bill, to almost 25,000 of my constituents, are on top of the support that has already been put in place, with the £1,000 that families will benefit from through the taper rate, the living wage rise and the £330 that most of those in work will get through raising the national insurance threshold, meaning that tens of thousands of

people in North West Durham will be better off as a result of these changes and showing that we are providing support now, just like we did during the pandemic, during the cost of living issues due to international factors such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

**Dr Coffey:** My hon. Friend is right to point out the additional measures. I do not know exactly how many people in his constituency will be affected, but I rely on his excellent local knowledge as a great constituency MP. Absolutely—I am setting out additional measures to those that he has outlined.

The Bill will deliver one-off additional payments responding to the challenges faced by people in every part of our country over the coming months. I thank the usual channels and the House more broadly for agreeing that it can make its necessary progress today. Its provisions are intentionally straightforward and will enable a straightforward approach for claimants, with no complicated forms, no bureaucracy and nobody having to make an additional claim, as payments will automatically go into people's bank accounts.

The actions in the Bill will boost the budgets of millions of stretched families in every part of the United Kingdom, helping them through the cost of living challenge. I commend it to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the shadow Secretary of State, Jonathan Ashworth.

2.45 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): Let me begin by being clear with the Secretary of State: we do not intend to divide the House. We understand that the Government need to put in place the architecture to make these arrangements swiftly. None the less, we want to put on the record a number of points, on which I hope Ministers will provide some clarity in their response to Second Reading and throughout proceedings today.

Like many Members, the message that I am hearing up and down the country could not be clearer: for many of our constituents, these are the toughest times that anyone can remember. More than a decade of underwhelming economic growth has meant that today the cost of living is skyrocketing and pay packets are failing to keep pace with inflation. By next April, wages will be worth £2,000 less in real terms than in 2020, with real pay in the UK falling at the fastest rate for 20 years, leaving household finances stretched to breaking point. Prices are up in the shops and the cost of petrol is through the roof. Energy bills are sky-high, and the lifting of the price cap later this year means that they will increase further. Families everywhere are saying, "Enough is enough!" It should be no surprise that today's statistics show a 12% increase in those with council tax arrears.

The Secretary of State took great care to explain why she is taking action to help those in need now, and the measures are welcome as far as they go, but the House has to understand that the future is bleak: energy market expert Cornwall Insight is warning that the energy cap could rise by a further £1,000 in October; inflation is at 9.1% today, with worse on the way; the cost of living will rapidly rise further; pensioners will see the value of their pensions and savings attacked by inflation; and

[Jonathan Ashworth]

working families will be left desperate to protect the value of their wages from the ravages of inflation—and the edict of Ministers tells them to take a pay cut.

Ministers hope that interest rates and tax increases will dampen demand in the economy, and thereby slow economic output. Pain today and pain tomorrow is their policy to get inflation under control, even though the Office for Budget Responsibility warned, following the spring statement, that we are heading for the biggest fall in living standards since the 1950s, with more children set to be pushed into absolute poverty. Labour was clear that taking no action following the spring statement would have amounted to the wilful impoverishment of many of our constituents—a price that we never believe is worth paying. We therefore proposed a windfall tax on North sea gas and oil producers to help families and pensioners, and we are pleased that after some months the Government finally listened to our representations.

We recognise the extra support that the Government are allocating today, but in reality this legislation—important though it is—is a short-term sticking plaster because of a series of long-term policy failures to grow our economy sufficiently, and to address the longer-term problems and hardship that have been growing over the last 10 years due to attacks on social security and unfair pay settlements.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Does the shadow Secretary of State agree that missing from the Bill is any support for unpaid carers, and does he share my hope that the Government will bring forward proposals in the near future to help that group?

**Jonathan Ashworth:** The hon. Gentleman anticipates a point I am going to make, which is why now is a good moment to turn to the specifics of the Bill. I want to raise a number of points that I hope Treasury Benchers will address throughout proceedings this afternoon, particularly regarding how the Bill impacts on four groups: the self-employed on universal credit; disabled people and carers; pensioners; and larger families.

First, on the self-employed who claim universal credit, the minimum income floor will reduce universal credit payments for some self-employed people to zero. Could the Minister clarify, in responding to the debate, whether self-employed universal credit claimants whose UC payments are zero purely because of the minimum income floor will be entitled to these cost of living payments?

Secondly, on how this impacts on disabled people, the disability charity Sense has warned today of the increasing numbers of disabled people pushed into debt as a result of the rising cost of living. Those on the Treasury Bench must surely understand that many disabled people have needs that make heating and electricity to power equipment particularly central to their wellbeing, so that economising on energy can bring severe hardship.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) raised a few moments ago, disabled people on non-means-tested benefits will get £150 as a minimum, and indeed those on means-tested benefits will get the £650. I appreciate that the Secretary of State says this is a responsibility of the Business Secretary, but Ministers

did recently change the rules on the warm home discount scheme so that 290,000 people on disability living allowance, PIP and attendance allowance are no longer eligible.

For people on PIP, that means that the Government are giving £150 to them after it was taken off them through the changes to the warm home discount scheme. This is robbing Peter to pay Paul, and it suggests that one hand of Government does not know what the other hand of Government is doing. How can that be justified?

**Marsha De Cordova:** My right hon. Friend is making an excellent point, and he probably articulated it even better than I did. Does he also agree with me that the whole premise of DLA, PIP and attendance allowance is to help meet some of the extra costs faced by disabled people? The Secretary of State has stated that this is a different Department—it is BEIS—but she must none the less acknowledge the purpose of these benefits, and taking away one payment and giving some money back with another is actually going to leave nearly 300,000 disabled people worse off.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I can assure her that she speaks with an eloquence on these matters that I rarely muster, and I thought she put her points powerfully.

Even though many disabled people have been given an additional £150, for many of them that will not cover the additional cost of inflation when applied to disability-related benefits. For example, for those on universal credit, the supplement for someone unable to work or engage in work-related activity rose by about £240 a year less than if it had been uprated in line with the consumer prices index. In addition, someone receiving the daily living component of PIP is worse off by £185 on the standard rate and by £274 on the enhanced rate as a result of the sub-inflation upratings later this year.

That is one of the reasons why many people out there are particularly concerned that the Secretary of State—I understand that, in legislation, she has to review these matters—and the Government may well resile from their commitment to inflation-increase benefits and pensions this September.

Equally, the hon. Gentleman who sits for a Welsh constituency that I cannot remember, and I am not sure I can pronounce it either—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) raised carer's allowance, and people claiming carer's allowance will not get any extra support. Carers often have higher energy bills because of their caring responsibilities, yet people in receipt of carer's allowance—remember that they provide care for at least 35 hours a week and earn less than £132 a week—are likely to be hit hard without additional support. Why were carers left out of this package?

Thirdly, I want to talk about pensioners. We have 2 million pensioners in poverty, and the number is rising. The Prime Minister promised that pensions would keep pace with wages and prices, but, without any thought as to how hard pensioners are finding it to make ends meet, Ministers broke that promise by removing the so-called triple lock. That meant a real-terms cut of about £500 in the basic state pension—the biggest real-terms cut, I believe, for about 50 years. I was pleased to see Ministers commit to honouring the triple lock for next

year, but we can see the pressure Ministers are coming under and we hope the Secretary of State does not break that promise for the next financial year.

We also need clarity from Ministers on whether the standard minimum guarantee of pension credit will be uprated in line with the consumer prices index in September. Pensioners on pension credit will receive the £650, as the Secretary of State knows, but pension credit uptake is not what it should be. If we could drive up the uptake of pension credit, Loughborough University estimates than an extra 440,000 retirees could be lifted out of poverty. With approximately 850,000 pensioners not claiming pension credit, a huge number are set to miss out. Failing to do more to increase pension credit uptake could mean that two thirds of the poorest pensioners will not get the extra £650.

I recognise that the Minister for Pensions and Financial Inclusion—the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), who is not in his place—has been leading a campaign to drive up the uptake and has even been ballroom dancing with Len Goodman. However, the Bill's impact assessment, which the Government have published today, shows that 1.4 million pensioners are benefiting, but in the second round it is estimated that 26,000 fewer payments will be made to pension credit recipients. Can the Secretary of State or the Minister responding to the debate—the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley)—explain why that is and what it says about the success, or otherwise, of the Government's pension credit take-up campaign?

Families with children are poorly served by flat rate payments. Families in the bottom half of the income distribution with two or more children spend twice as much on food, essential household goods and services, clothing, footwear and transport. Families with three or more children are likely to spend an additional £500 on energy, but the support on offer is not adjusted for size of family.

We recognise that the cost of living payment, combined with the £150 council tax rate, will provide £1,200 for working-age households in receipt of means-tested benefits. However, that will not cover the whole increase in energy bills, especially as further large increases in the price cap, perhaps of £1,000, are expected in October. Nor will it provide much mitigation of the wider price food rises.

Let me spell it out. We know that there will be another rise in gas and electricity prices, possibly of £800 to £1,000, for a family who have already faced an increase of £850. That family will therefore need to find at least £1,650. They will get the council tax deduction of £150; they will get the energy bill loan, turned into a grant, of £400; and they will get £650, paid in two instalments, supposedly to cover the year ahead. That is £1,200 in total, which will still leave them £450 worse off because of the energy price rises this year. As that comes on top of last October's £20-a-week cut in universal credit, that family's standard of living will be down by £1,450 on last year—£28 a week. That is even before we take into account the food shopping bill, which Kantar has today predicted will go up by at least £380. The Governor of the Bank of England has warned of "apocalyptic" increases in food prices.

Surely more Government action is needed. Ministers will retort that they are helping families to find employment; employment should indeed be the best defence against the rising cost of living, but under this Government,

8 million people in work are in poverty and are picking up food parcels for their families because of low pay and family circumstances. Some 2 million working families are on universal credit and have suffered similar losses to those who are out of work: they have lost the £20 uplift, they faced a real-terms cut in universal credit in April, and their wages are being outpaced by inflation, even after the national living wage increase.

I recognise that the Minister will respond that the Chancellor has reduced the UC taper rate and increased the work allowance, and that those with the highest earnings who qualify for universal credit gain the most from the reduced taper. However, for those with very low earnings, the gains are much less than the losses elsewhere. A lone parent with two children would lose £1,200 if they were not working, but would lose £1,300 if they were working 10 hours, nearly £700 if they were working 20 hours and £400 if they were working 30 hours. These families have already lost substantial amounts, and the package that the Chancellor has announced does not make up for it. Those examples are not exceptional. They will have a familiarity to every Member who speaks to their local food bank or citizens advice bureau. The problem is that the flat payment system takes no account of family size or special needs.

I hope the Minister addresses those points this afternoon, because we need more than quick fixes to protect the living standards of our constituents and tackle the chronic injustices of poverty. We entered the living standards crisis not just on the back of years of underwhelming economic growth, but after years of cutting, freezing and restricting access to social security, which left us with a threadbare system and an explosion in food bank, baby bank, bedding bank and fuel bank usage. The real-terms value of out-of-work benefits is the lowest for years. We have seen the pernicious two-child policy, caps on support, inadequate help with housing and council tax, and real-terms cuts to universal credit—real-terms deductions to the amount that people on universal credit are forced to grapple with.

That is why child poverty is rising on its way to 5 million, with half a million more children destitute and 500,000 children going without a decent bed at night. The outcry from our communities forced the Government to take short-term action, but we need a long-term plan to rebuild social security, grow the economy, raise living standards, and defeat child and pensioner poverty, so that the victims of poverty can participate fully in society. That is what I am determined to build.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I have now to announce the result of today's deferred Division on the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2022. The Ayes were 215 and the Noes were 70.

*[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]*

3.1 pm

**Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con):** Thank you for calling me so early in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is a great privilege.

There will be no surprise that I welcome this Bill, which will help millions of families during these very difficult times. The Labour party thinks that the only way to help families is to just keep increasing benefits, but working-class people in places such as Ashfield are



[Lee Anderson]

a bit more savvy than that. They realise that we make families better off by increasing opportunities through the job market, and education and training, which leads to promotion and better job prospects.

For the purposes of this debate, we need to go back in history a bit, to the end of the '90s, when Tony Blair came into government and introduced something called the tax credit system. Although at the time it seemed an incredibly kind thing to do, we are now feeling the unintended consequences. It has damaged businesses and damaged the prospects of millions and millions of people throughout the UK. I will give the House a good example.

A friend of mine refused to work more than 16 hours for over 10 years because she was a single parent. However, that backfired when her daughter got to 18 and my friend lost all her tax credits, her child benefit and her child support. Now we have a lady in her 40s who has, overnight, just lost half her weekly income, and she is stuck in a low-skilled, low-paid, minimum-wage job. She has never upskilled, despite her employer wanting her to upskill for years and years, so she has missed out on that career development, which could have led to a better job and less dependency on benefits, all because she did not want to work more than 16 hours a week.

This Government are trying to fix things like that with the universal credit taper, which will now allow people like my friend to work more hours and get a better paid job without it affecting their income as much as it would have affected hers all those years ago. That is the way to tackle poverty and help to people achieve their goals, but what Labour did is trap people—millions of people—into just having 16-hour—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members can shake their heads and chunter away, but it is true. I know hundreds of people in Ashfield who were trapped in 16-hour-a-week jobs, and what good has it done them, years later? Ten years later, they are still in a minimum-wage or living-wage job, they have not upskilled and they have not moved any further, and they lose all their benefits when their children leave school. That is not progress.

The answer that the Labour party had, when all these people were stuck in 16-hour jobs and we could not get them to work a full-time job, was simple: open the floodgates and import cheap foreign labour, which is what happened. Twenty years later, we have a failed migration policy and a failed benefits policy, which has led to millions of people being trapped in a poverty cycle. We have spent the last 12 years trying to put right this mess and it is not easy when people are trapped in a poverty cycle —*[Interruption.]* Lots of Members on the Opposition Benches are grinning, but I will crack on.

Our benefits system in the UK is very generous—*[Interruption.]* It is generous. I will give an example. If my friend was a single parent now, living in Ashfield with two children and working 16 hours a week on the living wage, she would be getting £18,000 a year in universal credit and £6,000 or £7,000 a year in wages, which is an income of about £24,000 a year. She would not be paying any income tax, which is a bonus. To have that sort of income, a person would have to earn about £30,000 a year, which is a good wage in Ashfield.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): If the hon. Gentleman thinks that is very generous, how does it compare with benefits systems across the EU, for example, that are significantly more generous?

**Lee Anderson:** I will tell the hon. Lady what is generous: a single parent, like my friend and I were all those years ago, getting £24,000 a year for working 16 hours a week. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady can shake her head, but I think that is a pretty generous payment. That person would not be paying any income tax. Come to Ashfield and ask if £24,000 net is a good income. It would be a struggle to find people who are earning that sort of income so, yes, it is a generous income.

As we level up the country, we need to level up the skills of people who are trapped in this life of benefit dependency caused by the Labour party—I will stick to my words. In the meantime, this caring Government realise that families need extra support, which is why we are providing £37 billion to support families. Remember this is taxpayers' money. There is no magic money tree, so hard-working people are having to pay for this.

This Bill will ensure swift action by providing the power to make two cost of living payments of £650 to 8 million households throughout the UK. This is real, targeted help for real, vulnerable people. The £200 rebate on energy bills has been doubled to £400, and it is now a grant, so it will not be paid back. The living wage is up, the national living wage is up, the universal credit taper rate is up and national insurance has been cut, so 70% of those who pay national insurance will pay less and more than 2 million people will pay no national insurance at all. We are doing all we can to ensure we help to keep people's head above the water by spending more than £80 billion on universal credit and legacy benefits, which now represent 3.8% of our GDP.

We cannot keep asking the hard-working taxpayer to put their hand in their pocket to pay more and more. We must all do our bit. Although I welcome that the Bill will get immediate support to families, we must all work hard to make sure every single person in this country has the chance to support themselves. The benefits system should be there to help people in their hour of need; it should not be a way of life.

If it were left to Labour, everyone would be sat at home feeling sorry for themselves, but I am different. I want people to have a good job, to earn more money and to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

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

3.8 pm

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak for the SNP on the Social Security (Additional Payments) Bill. The Chancellor announced this uprating a number of weeks ago, having dragged his feet for so long. He announced the energy loan at the Budget, after announcing it earlier in the year, with a "Ta-da! Look at this! This is wonderful. We are giving you all this." It was never sufficient. We called immediately for the energy loan to be a grant and for it to be increased.

The big announcement at the Budget was, "Hey, look, you can have cheaper solar panels!" That does not help my constituents, who are literally unable to buy

food. We called for these changes then, and the Chancellor waited and waited until the end of May to make this announcement.

It has been a few weeks since the end of May, and we saw this Bill only last week. Parliamentarians have been able to scrutinise this Bill for only one week. The Government, or the Secretary of State, may say that this is because the Bill is so complicated, but they had weeks beforehand in which to decide what it would look like, and they have had weeks since the announcement in which to present it and give us an opportunity to see it. We should not be doing this in a single day. I appreciate that there is a tight timescale and that the Bill must be put through now in order for the payments to be made; what concerns me is the time during which we have not been able to scrutinise it effectively.

My other concern about process involves the money motion. It is drawn as tightly as possible. No doubt when we reach the Committee stage the Government will say what they say in every Finance Bill Committee: "All the amendments are about having reports. All the Opposition want are reports, rather than any actual changes to the Bill." However, such a tight money motion makes it impossible for us effectively to put forward the asks that we have and to make it clear that this is wholly insufficient and that there are massive changes that we want to introduce.

Nevertheless, I congratulate the House on the fact that we are actually debating spend. That is very exciting—it is wonderful—because we never debate spend. We get the estimates for five days a year, or is it three? For a handful of days a year, we are allowed to debate those. To be fair, we are now allowed to debate spend, but it does not happen. We have the Budget, and then we have the Finance Bill. The Finance Bill is entirely about taxation: it is not about spend. We do not get the opportunity to debate and scrutinise spend properly, so it is very nice to get the chance to do so today—albeit with a money motion that is so unbelievably restrictive that we cannot put forward any amendments that make any sense or assist our constituents in any way.

Before I proceed, I want to thank Chris Mullins-Silverstein and Linda Nagy, who have been incredibly helpful in putting stuff together very quickly to enable me to make a speech that makes sense—or, I hope, largely makes sense.

This is the situation in which we find ourselves. As we heard from the right hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), in October, energy bills will be up by £1,500 for the average household, which is far more than the amount that the Government propose to provide for people—and that is before we take into account the other increases that we are seeing. According to the Office for National Statistics, pasta is up by 50%, bread by 16% and rice by 15%. I pay tribute to Jack Monroe for the huge amount of work she has done on the "Vimes Boots" index, which allows inflation to be measured not just in the way in which it has historically been measured, but in a way that relates to how people shop—the people at the lowest end of the income spectrum, who count every single penny in the supermarket to work out whether they can possibly afford what they have put in their baskets. Inflation for those lowest-income families has increased by significantly more than inflation for the families who are earning more. It is even worse

for disabled householders, who are seeing even more significant increases in energy bills, and the same goes for pensioners.

I was delighted to hear the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) suggest that things are very generous. He cannot have the same inbox as me. According to my inbox, things were dire before Brexit, dire before covid, and dire before the massive increase in inflation that we are seeing now, and they have only got worse. The fact is that the impact of Brexit has increased our food prices. Less migration means less money for the Government to spend, while net migration reduces net public sector debt and increases the amount that the Government have to spend. The former Chancellor George Osborne's Red Books make that explicit. It is clear that he was seeking to crack down on migration, and that doing so would reduce the amount of money that the Government had to spend. It costs money for us to reduce migration. It means that we will have less to spend on people who stay here, who live here, who work here.

The announcement that this is a £37 billion package is genuinely a joke. In the Government's calculation of the £37 billion, they have included the fuel duty changes. A significant number of my constituents, especially the poorest, do not drive. They are impacted by the price of supermarket vans having to drive around and small businesses' costs increasing, but the fuel duty does not make a difference to their daily lives. They do not fill up their fuel tanks because they do not have fuel tanks. They cannot afford cars. So including the fuel duty rise in the £37 billion is ridiculous. Including the freeze on alcohol duty is one of the cheekiest things I have ever seen in this place, and I was here all the way through the Brexit debates. The Government cannot include an alcohol duty freeze and say that they are helping with the cost of living. "We are helping the poorest people to save money on their alcohol." People who cannot afford pasta are not helped by freezing alcohol duty.

These things that are being included in the £37 billion are listed on the factsheet on the Government's website, by the way. The £37 billion also includes lots of already planned stuff. It includes what has happened with national insurance, and it includes things that were put in place when the Government thought that increasing benefits by 3.1% in April 2020 was sufficient. It includes a massive chunk of that. The Government cannot stand up and realistically say that this is a £37 billion package, because it is not. These are not the positive changes that my constituents and people across Scotland and the UK want to see.

I am pleased to hear that disabled people are getting an additional amount of money. That is a good move by the Government, but it does not take into account the increased costs that disabled people are seeing, including the massive increase in scarcity affecting gluten-free diets, for example. More disabled people have specialist diets than people who will not get the £150 increase. Disabled people spend more time at home, and it is the same for pensioners. The increases that are happening for those two groups are not sufficient to cover the increases they are facing in their energy costs, particularly, and in specialist diet costs.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I am listening very carefully to the hon. Lady's arguments, and she is making some important and useful points,

[Stephen Crabb]

but I have to disagree with her. She cannot honestly stand up here this afternoon and almost dismiss this enormous sum of expenditure that the Government are making by saying that it is not sufficient and that she wants more. Perhaps she could explain where all this extra resource is going to come from. I personally believe that the Chancellor of the Exchequer listened and took on board arguments that many of us were making earlier this year about the rising cost of living, and that he has done everything possible to make his pounds go as far as they can in providing relief to those on low incomes.

**Kirsty Blackman:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer did listen to the arguments that were made, and I absolutely welcome the fact that he came back and said, “What we did before was not enough.” I do not know if he actually said that, but he said that he was going to do more and bring forward more. I am pleased that we are discussing this today, and I am pleased that these increases are happening, but I am making the case that the additional payments that are being made do not cover the cost of living increases. I do not think they are sufficient, and I do not think they will assist our constituents who are already struggling. The right hon. Member asked where the money would come from. We have always said that the windfall tax should be applied more broadly than just to oil and gas companies. We have always said that it should be for all those who made excessive profits during covid. Why should the Amazons and the Sercos of this world get away with making so much money during the pandemic and not have the Government look at that?

The reality is that the UK Government do not have to run a balanced budget. That is how the UK Government budget works. The Scottish Government have to run a balanced budget by law; the UK Government do not. There is far more flexibility in the budget than the Chancellor explains. When he stood up on 27 May, he was already looking at an additional £30 billion of fiscal headroom in the next few years, compared with his earlier projections and targets—compared with what he had hoped to get. There was already extra space, before he made the decision to introduce the supplementary tax on oil and gas companies. There is money there to do the additional payments and the additional requests that we are asking for today.

The UK Government have failed in a number of places. For example, they have failed to keep the triple lock for pensioners. They failed to keep the universal credit lifeline. They failed to implement a pension credit take-up strategy. They failed to come forward with cost of living measures as early as they should have during the course of the Budget. They have failed to scrap the evil sanctions regime. They have failed to produce a strategy to tackle child property. They have failed to bring in a minimum child maintenance payment. They have failed to uprate benefits by anywhere close to inflation this year. They have failed to scrap the rape clause. They have failed to bring in a real living wage that people can actually live on. They have failed to bring forward the long-promised employment Bill. They have failed to end the Department for Work and Pensions vicious loans clawback.

In contrast, the SNP Scottish Government running that balanced budget is delivering for people in Scotland. In Scotland, we are mitigating the bedroom tax. We are doubling our game-changing Scottish child payment. We are uprating benefits by double the level that the UK Government are. We are paying carer’s allowance supplement to people who are carers. We are paying £200 child winter heating assistance to families with severely disabled children and young people. We are increasing our school clothing grant, which is not available across the board in England and is at the discretion of local authorities here. We are offering 1,140 hours of childcare to all eligible children, no matter their parents’ working status. We are providing five new benefits worth up to a maximum of more than £10,000 by the time a first child turns six. That is £8,200 more than that provided in England and Wales. We are also providing additional money for subsequent children that is significantly in excess of the amount being provided here.

I therefore have some calls for the UK Government. I would like the UK Government to now uprate all social security benefits by 10% and backdate that to April 2020. The Chancellor stood there and said that uprating benefits would be less than the additional payment he is making—I want him to do both. This is a sticking plaster. Giving this additional one-off payment does not solve things for next year. It does not undo the fact that this year’s increase was woefully insufficient.

I would like the UK Government to make an additional £25 a week uplift to universal credit and to extend that to all legacy benefits to undo the harm done by cancelling the £20 a week increase last year. I would like them to cancel the rape clause, the two-child limit and the bedroom tax. There is only so much mitigation that the Scottish Government can do within our balanced budget.

I would like the UK Government to produce a child poverty strategy and to make tackling child poverty a national mission, as it is in Scotland. I would like the UK Government to bring in the long-promised employment Bill. They promised 28 times that they would bring in an employment Bill in the Queen’s Speech, and no employment Bill appeared in the Queen’s Speech. I would like them to match Scotland’s commitment to dignity and respect for those claiming disability benefits. I would like them to bring in a real living wage and to scrap the ageism in the pretend living wage.

From day one of the Chancellor’s energy loan, which he announced earlier this year, we called for it to be a grant, rather than a loan. In May, the Chancellor U-turned. He changed it from a loan to a grant and he increased it, like we had asked. Now, we must see a U-turn on the five-week wait for universal credit. We must see that payment become a grant for those who get universal credit. We must not see those payments being clawed back.

The UK Government have 85% of the powers on social security. They have all the powers that relate to energy, all the powers that relate to the minimum wage and all the powers that relate to national insurance. We are being failed time and time again by the UK Government. We have asked for these measures to be devolved. We have amended things for these measures to be devolved. We have voted for these measures to be devolved. We have called, at every opportunity, for devolution of employment law, for devolution of energy,



for devolution over the minimum wage, and for devolution over national insurance. The UK Government refuse. The UK Government are continually refusing and clawing back powers from the Scottish Parliament—in their United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, for example. The Brexit Freedoms Bill is set to remove powers from this Parliament and centre it even more in the Executive than it already is. This is not the way to run a democracy.

People are struggling. Even with these payments on the horizon, people still struggle to see how they will get through the year. The only choice is for Scotland to become an independent country. Only by having the full powers of independence will we be able to protect people and help them through the cost of living crisis, in contrast to the UK Government who refuse to do so.

3.25 pm

**Sir Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I am very pleased that the Bill is in front of us. The Select Committee has been clear in the past few weeks that, without a big measure on this kind of scale, low-income families would be in very serious trouble indeed in the coming months. I echo the tribute that has just been paid by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) to Jack Monroe and her campaigning on this. She gave very compelling evidence to the Select Committee at our meeting on 9 March.

The package that has come forward has been widely welcomed. We put out a call for evidence on the cost of living in May. In response, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said that,

“the package provided much-needed support for households, which will protect many of them against rising costs over the coming year.”

Citizens Advice welcomes the targeted support to low-income households and hoped that it would

“start to reverse the worrying trends we have seen in our data, including record-breaking food bank referrals.”

Unlike the previous announcements, this May package is properly targeted on low-income families, as it needed to be. The Resolution Foundation described it as offsetting “the poor targeting of previous announcements.”

It also described it as “serious redistribution”. It is, I think, a serious response to a serious problem. I also welcome the Chancellor’s change of heart over the windfall tax to fund some of the help that is needed.

However, we need to be clear: the reason the Bill is needed is that the system for social security uprating has failed. It is a long-standing system. There is nothing new about the way it is done, but the unforeseen burst in inflation means that it simply has not worked this year. On this occasion, the decision has been taken to replace adequate uprating with ad hoc payments from the Treasury, which will certainly help us through the next few months. We need now to rethink the uprating system to make sure that it does not let us down again.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** I have a question for my right hon. Friend, the Chair of the Select Committee. Is he aware that, in 1976, the then Social Services Secretary, Barbara Castle, came to the House and uprated benefits and pensions for a second time in a year—there was a cost of living crisis then as well. The policy of the then shadow Secretary of State, Norman Fowler, was that

uprating should take place twice a year. I wonder whether the Select Committee will consider the arguments that were made in the 1970s.

**Sir Stephen Timms:** My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. The Select Committee will certainly be looking at that. We are conducting an inquiry later this year on the question of the level of benefits, and the issue of how benefits should be uprated will certainly feature. I am intrigued to learn that the Secretary of State was able to do that in the 1970s given that we have been told that the IT systems in the 2020s cannot cope with it. I am certainly interested in seeing more on that.

**Stephen Crabb:** The right hon. Gentleman is making an interesting and important point about how we do upratings. I urge him not to get drawn too far down the path of looking at the system in the 1970s, which was in very different circumstances. There is an issue about the timing of uprating and the figures that are used to calculate it, but the bigger practical issue is the different IT systems and the plethora of different benefits that are still in play. Does he agree that we need to find a way to rationalise and simplify them?

**Sir Stephen Timms:** That would help—just modernising the old systems would help, and I will say something about that in a moment.

We are getting ad hoc payments from the Treasury to tide us over. The Secretary of State rightly spelled out to the Committee the downsides of one-off ad hoc payments such as those that the Bill enables. In oral evidence in February last year, she told the Committee that there were higher risks of fraud attached to one-off payments and that they can make it difficult for claimants to budget effectively—both quite telling points. She said that one-off payments were not

“one of the Department’s preferred approaches”

for providing that financial support. She noted:

“There are some challenges about fraud”

and that there would be difficulties if people claiming tax credits received a one-off payment and then moved to universal credit shortly afterwards. On the question of what might work best for claimants, she told us:

“Previous experience would be that a steady sum of money would probably be more beneficial to claimants and customers, to help with that budgeting process.”

I think she is right; it is not ideal for the Treasury to provide lump sums instead.

Why was proper uprating not done in this case? The Chancellor pointed out that legacy benefits cannot be quickly uprated because they are run on antiquated IT systems, as the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) referred to, so uprating takes several months. The Chancellor told us that that was why he was unwilling simply to uprate benefits: it could have been done quickly for universal credit, as we discovered in the pandemic, but not for legacy benefits.

In an earlier debate, I recall the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) brandishing a document from an IT company, perhaps Oracle, about the front end that it had built for the Department’s legacy systems, which it said enabled changes to be made to them more quickly. I wonder whether the Minister, in closing,

[Sir Stephen Timms]

could tell us the truth behind that claim about the front end that had been provided. I know that the Department has certainly commissioned such front ends for the legacy systems over a long time, so I am interested to know why, notwithstanding what that brandished document said, it is apparently still the case that uprating takes four or five months. Are front ends in place? Why have they apparently not made faster changes possible?

In our June 2020 report on the Department's response to coronavirus, the Select Committee recommended an increase in the speed with which changes could be made to legacy benefits. We said:

"People will be claiming legacy benefits until at least September 2024, the Government's most recent estimate for completing the rollout of Universal Credit. It is simply not tenable for the Department to continue to operate antiquated systems that prevent Ministers from making timely changes to the rates at which legacy benefits are paid. We recommend that the Department work to increase the speed with which changes can be made to legacy benefit rates."

In its response in September that year, the Department said that it

"recognises the need to be able to respond to events flexibly which is why we are investing in Universal Credit which is more agile than the systems that support legacy benefits."

While substantial numbers of people depend on legacy benefits, the Government surely need to keep the systems that support those benefits fit for purpose. They are clearly not fit for purpose at the moment, and that ought to be addressed.

**Kirsty Blackman:** On that note, the new systems that we have created in Scotland under Social Security Scotland are doing exactly what the right hon. Gentleman asks. It has the ability to make those extra payments, because we set up the systems. Does he agree that the Government need to just invest to sort that out for many thousands of people?

**Sir Stephen Timms:** It certainly does need to be done. I am pleased to tell the hon. Lady that on Monday the Select Committee will visit Social Security Scotland and that our vice-chair, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), who is in his place, will be part of that group. We look forward to that visit.

The reason why benefit uprating has not worked this year is, of course, the six-month gap between September, when the inflation figure forms the basis of uprating for the following year, and April, when increases take effect. In response to our call for evidence on the cost of living, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation called on the Government to

"commit to a much shorter timeframe for annual uprating between measuring inflation and uprating accordingly, to ensure benefit uprating genuinely reflects inflation for the year in question."

Lloyds Bank Foundation told us that the Government should

"consider uprating benefits in line with inflation in the autumn to ensure they more accurately reflect the true cost of living."

That sounds like what was done in the 1970s. The Legatum Institute also suggested reducing the delay between CPI measurement and the application of uprating

as well as introducing a mid-year uprating review. Citizens Advice called for a more sustainable, responsive uprating approach, which means

"addressing the lag between benefit uprating decision-making and implementation and the exclusion of the benefit cap from wider uprating."

It says that while the one-off payments to be made under the Bill

"are more generous...for some households than if uprating had been brought forward",

there are problems. For example, as we were reminded by my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State, the one-off payments are the same amount regardless of family size. They also have cut-off dates, which risks arbitrarily excluding people from support.

Flat-rate payments being irrespective of family size appears to be pretty unfair to larger families. Overall, the package is somewhat more generous than early benefit uprating would have been, but it is less generous for larger families. The justification for that is not clear.

The North East Child Poverty Committee told us that

"a flat-rate £650 payment for all households on means-tested benefits, regardless of household size, additionally fails to recognise the clear link between family size and essential outgoings, with many larger families (already at much greater risk of poverty, a situation compounded by the two-child limit) facing intolerable financial pressures as a result of rising household bills."

I will make one final point. One great advantage of the Chancellor's package for low-income families, compared with a straightforward benefit uprating—I was grateful to the Secretary of State for confirming this—is that the benefit cap does not apply. It is striking that when it appears that the headline rate of social security benefits is likely to be raised by perhaps 10-plus per cent. next year, there is no indication at all about the benefit cap being lifted at all. That means that the growing number of families whose benefit has been capped will receive no increase in their income at all at a time when inflation is likely to be over 10%.

In evidence to the Select Committee, the Child Poverty Action Group Told us that

"the Government has made a welcome commitment to increase benefits in April 2023 in line with prices. However, not all price-related elements of the system are included in the annual uprating exercise and the benefit cap means a substantial minority of claimants—an estimated 150,000—will see no increase at all and face another real terms cut to their benefits."

At a time when inflation is so high, surely at least the level of the benefit cap must be reviewed. Will the Minister give us any encouragement that it will be, ahead of April next year? For now, and in the context of the Bill, it is welcome, and quite a significant precedent, that the benefit cap will not apply to these additional payments.

3.39 pm

**Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD):** It is vital that we provide additional support to those in receipt of disability and means-tested benefits who are covered under this Bill, but in itself it is not an adequate response to the depth and breadth of the cost of living crisis we are currently experiencing. The Chancellor is already hammering families with an £800 tax hike this year, more than wiping out measures in this Bill for those who will benefit from it. The national insurance

rise and the freezing of income tax thresholds are unfair tax rises, making the cost of living crisis worse for millions of families across the UK by decreasing employees' take-home pay. Households are facing the highest tax burden in 70 years; the typical family will see a hit of £1,200 a year through a combination of Conservative party tax rises and soaring energy prices, according to the Resolution Foundation. We welcome the Bill's provision creating the £650 payment, but call for it to be paid in full in July instead of being paid in two instalments in July and October, because people need that support right now—although more support might still be required in the autumn.

The simplest way for the Government to help people right now would be to scrap the tax hikes to which I have referred. What we most want is an emergency VAT cut. Cutting VAT from 20% to 17.5% for one year would save families an average of £600; it would put money back into people's pockets right now, boosting the economy and supporting struggling businesses. The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that the Treasury is due to take in an extra £8.6 billion in VAT due to inflation, which is £430 per family, so we think the Government could afford to fund that.

Cutting VAT would help to address spiralling inflation as well as keeping costs down for families. A similar VAT cut in 2008 boosted retail sales by about 1% and aggregate expenditure by 0.4%; that shows the difference it could make to struggling businesses right now. At the time of that same VAT cut in December 2008 inflation fell from 4.1% to 3.1%, and a similar saving right now could make a huge difference to struggling families.

In addition to the welcome targeted support announced in this Bill we would like the £20 uplift to universal credit restored. We accept all the arguments that that was an emergency measure, but this is also an emergency. The Government said at the time that higher wages are a better option than benefit increases, but we have seen just this week the tension caused between the historically high rate of inflation and the downward pressure the Government would like to maintain on employee wages, and this debate will be played out in many different circumstances across the summer and into the autumn. The Government's argument that wage increases are the route to restoring household finances will come under considerable pressure, so I encourage them to think about that £20 a week uplift once more, because it would provide some of the poorest households on UC with an additional £1,000 a year, and we all know from our postbags what a difference that would make to the very poorest in our constituencies.

Much as we welcome the measures in the Bill, some of the most vulnerable groups in our society are not going to receive any additional support in facing the cost of living crisis thanks to these measures. The Government must look at that again. Several Members across the House have mentioned unpaid carers, and I want to add our contribution on that. They have once again been forgotten by the Government, who have provided no additional support despite the invaluable role unpaid carers play; it is difficult to calculate the additional pressures there would be on our care system if they did not play that role. As has been said, unpaid carers face additional costs as a result of their caring responsibilities. Those claiming carer's allowance are being excluded from the list of eligible benefit recipients,

leaving hundreds of thousands of unpaid carers, including 40% of working-age carers in receipt of carer's allowance, without any additional support as a result of this Bill.

Millions of vulnerable adults and children depend upon the efforts of our country's carers, yet as we see time and again, their voices are not being heard by the Government and again they are being excluded from support; they are being abandoned by the Government. The Liberal Democrats will keep championing the cause of unpaid carers, and I really impress on the Government the need to do more for those families.

Another issue that has been raised by a number of right hon. and hon. Members is families with multiple children in poverty. A flat-rate payment does not take into account the number of people in a household, which means that larger households, particularly those with more children, will face the squeeze much more severely. Of course, it is much more likely that a larger household will be made up of more children, so it is children who will suffer the most from having a flat-rate payment. Families in the bottom half of the income distribution with two or more children spend twice as much as equivalent families without children on food, essential household goods and services, clothing, footwear and transport, which leaves larger families in an especially vulnerable position when it comes to the level of inflation that we are seeing. The presence of younger children in a family exacerbates the prevalence of poverty due to the increased financial pressures that come with caring for a young child. Families with under-fives are therefore especially vulnerable.

My team recently met representatives of Little Village, a baby bank organisation that operates mainly in London. They told me that they are expecting to support an additional 1,000 families this year, and that they helped over 6,000 last year. Families cannot just go along to the baby banks; they have to be referred by education, health and social care professionals. These are only the families that have been identified by authorities as being most in need, so we know that the real impact of the cost of living squeeze on families with young children is likely to be much more widespread. Little Village staff told me that pregnant women are skipping meals in order to feed their toddlers, and that families are cutting toes out of their baby onesies to avoid having to buy new ones. This is what families are already having to do to deal with the cost of living crisis. The total number of children in poverty is predicted to rise to 5.2 million by 2023-24—an increase of 1.1 million children. We really need to do more to recognise the size of the households that are being targeted by some of this help.

I also want to mention rural communities and rising fuel prices. The Liberal Democrats want to see an expansion of the rural fuel duty relief scheme. It is currently available only in a handful of remote areas of the UK, but we know that the huge price rises in petrol across the country are having a disproportionate impact in areas where people cannot switch to public transport, particularly the most rural areas. The Government should immediately think about extending the rural fuel duty relief scheme where public transport options are limited, which would include Devon, Cornwall, Shropshire, Cumbria and some parts of Wales, and they should double the relief to 10p a litre. We are seeing real impacts on the rural economy because people are limiting how much they are driving, which affects not just local



[Sarah Olney]

businesses and the rural economy, but young people accessing educational and employment opportunities. This is something that the Government really must address as a matter of urgency.

I want to take the opportunity to raise the case of my constituent Edna Price, who lost her right arm in a horrifying industrial accident some 45 years ago. Most of her income since then has come from her industrial injuries compensation fund, but this is not a qualifying benefit. For Edna, it causes a number of practical, everyday problems. The income that she earns from the fund is not large, but because it is income from that particular source, and not from pension credit or a qualifying source, she regularly misses out on some of the other, non-financial benefits that are offered to people who are on qualifying benefits. I have written to the Department about Ms Price's case and would really welcome the opportunity to speak further to the Minister, because Edna will miss out again on this benefit, even though she already struggles to afford her fuel bills. I would very much welcome the opportunity to talk further to the Minister about how my constituent can potentially qualify for some of the other targeted benefits, to supplement her industrial injuries compensation.

I am pleased that the Chancellor is using the social security system to target this payment to households most at risk of hardship. I make the point again that it is a much more effective method than the use of council tax banding to calculate who is eligible for a rebate. In my constituency I think we have, out of all constituencies in the UK, the sixth-highest average house price, which causes residents who live in social housing in my constituency quite a few issues. They are on very low incomes, but the properties they live in often attract a high council tax band valuation, not least because the valuations were done back in the early '90s on much narrower value bands than I think we would think about using if they were to be done again today.

Too many of my low-income constituents are living in houses that do not qualify for the council tax rebate, in particular those in a number of socially rented homes in the Kingston Borough part of my constituency. When they were valued back in 1991, they were assigned a market value based on the privately sold homes around them. I am thinking of a particular estate in north Kingston with very small homes that house particularly vulnerable people. Those homes have been valued too highly to qualify for the council tax help with fuel bills. If there is anything the Minister can say in summing up, or that we could hear in due course from the Chancellor, on how that could be addressed, I would be very grateful. I wrote to the Department on this issue back in March and I have not had a response. As I say, in a constituency like mine with high housing values, it is a big issue for my low-income constituents.

I would like to close by saying that we welcome the measure in the Bill, but there is still so much more to do and so much more that the Government can do not just in spending, but in thinking about the way they identify people in need of assistance. I welcome the opportunity to hear more about that in due course.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I am sorry you have had to wait, Mr Mills.

3.52 pm

**Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was not planning to speak, but I have been tempted to say a few words.

There is a danger, in a debate where we have a quite a small audience, that we think that despite spending billions and billions of pounds, this is a small insignificant thing and not one of the biggest spending items the Government have tried to put through in rushed legislation in history. We should recognise that the Government have responded to a probably unprecedented crisis in a very generous and creative way. Those of us who have been wrestling with this issue for the last few months—almost the same crowd were here for the benefits uprating debate in February, pleading for more help and for a more generous uprating—would never have believed that we would see this level of support and ingenuity, given all the financial turmoil the country has been through in recent years. We must give the Government credit for what they have tried to do to help people through what we all hope is a relatively short-term blip, rather than a long-term, sustained problem.

With the £150 through council tax and the £200 loan via energy companies, that certainly seemed to be the original plan: we were hoping we could get people over a few months of a spike, and then things would get back to normal. We have to recognise now that that is not likely to be the case. We will have to have a much higher rise and one that is perhaps sustained for a longer period, unless some very happy events happen around the world and the situation starts to reverse more quickly than everybody seems to think.

For the next few months, the Government need to think about what they are trying to do and where they are trying to get to. The strategy may be to pass this money out on a one-off basis until next year's upratings, which we hope will have taken into account inflation so that people with income from benefits and pensions will be able to match the raised outgoings and we will have solved the problem. However, I am not convinced that that will be the case if inflation remains at 9% or 10% for a long period. In April, we will be giving people inflation based on the year to September 2022. There could be another 5% of inflation before we get to March and we may well be back in this position in a year's time.

Some clarity from the Government on the long-term plan would be helpful. We—the Select Committee and others—have been calling for a while for the Government to do some work to rebase benefits and ensure that key household compositions are provided with enough to meet the cost of living so that the increases will maintain that situation. Otherwise, there is a danger that in the next financial year, even with the uprating, people will get less than they had with this year's benefits plus the one-offs. In that case, people would be worse off in a year's time, even though their benefits would have gone up, because they would not have gone up by quite enough. We would be back in a similar crisis, needing more one-off payments in the next financial year—repeating those made in this financial year. That does not strike me as a long-term, sustainable way of running a welfare system.

Huge congratulations to the Government for what they have done in the legislation to get us—I hope—through this problem, but they now need to step back and work

out the long-term, sustainable way of delivering welfare at a level that meets the essential living standards that we expect it to. I do not think we can get there through haphazard one-offs and increases that are not based on real-terms inflation at the time such provisions are made. A second uprating in a year may be one way of mitigating that. In fact, it would probably help the Government, because when benefits are uprated, there is often a taper, meaning that not everybody gets the full amount, which could result in a bit of cost saving. The Government could also make use of the taper to be more generous at the lower end of the earnings spectrum, with a higher base amount, and less generous at the higher end, accepting that some people would not get the full amount. We are asking not necessarily for huge amounts of extra spending, but for more targeted and better use of the systems that are in place.

It is interesting that in February we were told that the Government could not possibly use any inflation number that was less than six months old because the systems could not cope, yet we now appear to have managed to come up with some ideas in late May and will make the first payment to people about seven weeks later, in the middle of July. That suggests that when there is a will and desire, things can be done at less than six months' notice. I hope that that will be built on when we get to next year's uprating, when we could at least try to creep the inflation number from September to December, so that it is only three months out of date by the time we get there.

On ingenuity, the Government's one-off help payments now involve: a payment by councils, reverse-engineering the council tax system; effectively a payment by energy companies for what was the loan and is now the gift; a payment through the welfare system; a payment through the tax credit system; and a payment that I think is the winter fuel allowance being increased for the year. That is quite a creative way of spreading the workload to make all those payments, but it produces a complicated system, whereby people do not really understand what help they have from who and why, and when they should have had it and if they have received the right amount.

Now that we have some more time to plan, if there are any future rounds—I hope we do not need them, but if we need them, we ought to have them—I would hope that we could find a way of such payments being made through one mechanism, or at least one for benefits and one for pensions. Having a multitude of mechanisms risks people missing out, because they just do not know who they should be checking with, or what they should be claiming and chasing.

It will be far more beneficial to my constituents if they get the first of these payments in the middle of July, as sadly many still have not had the £150 through the reverse running of the council tax system because the council still does not have the approved form to put on its website for people to fill in. That means it cannot make the payment to those who do not pay by direct debit; people still are not receiving the support we wanted them to have in April, and it will probably be a good few weeks before they get it.

There is much to welcome in the legislation. We should not be mealy-mouthed in our praise for the Government, as this is exceptional support at an exceptional time. I hope that we can do what we did through the

pandemic: rush things out at the start, and then think them through and develop better systems if we have to do a re-run as the crisis continues.

3.58 pm

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): This has been a short but useful debate. The Opposition will not oppose or seek to delay these payments, because any measure that puts money into the pockets of people on low incomes is to be welcomed, but it is important that we put on record some concerns about how the situation has come about.

The cost of living crisis hammering millions across the country comes on top of 12 years of a squeeze in living standards for people who have needed to draw on social security at various points to support their income. We went into the pandemic with child poverty rising for larger families, by the relative poverty measure; even by the absolute measure that the Government prefer, larger families are deeper in poverty. That is a consequence of years and years in which parts of the social security system such as tax credits and universal credit were either frozen or uprated by only 1%, even before we take into account the impact of the various caps and deductions.

As a result of the poor state of the social security system in 2020, the Government felt that they had to respond by introducing the £20 uplift, the impact of which can be seen from this spring's poverty statistics. Of course, we want as many people as possible to do well in employment and receive a rise in real wages so that they do not have to draw on means-tested benefits, but many people need support, particularly families with children. When it is adequate, that support has a real and profound impact on child poverty.

Having lost the £20 uplift last autumn, we are in the midst of a sudden and dramatic surge in inflation: the CPI rate is now at 10 times the level of spring 2021. That has left a large proportion of the population struggling with their bills. In particular, those on the lowest incomes face the lived choice between eating, putting food on the table for their children, heating their homes when it is cold, covering their rent, putting school uniforms on their children's back, and other essential costs. It remains true that if someone is on a low income, their costs are higher. We know, although it is not built into Government policy, that the poorest pay a premium for their goods and services, and they face the highest inflation. As a consequence of the changes in Government policy and the loss of the £20 uplift last year, the number of children living in poverty will be even higher when we measure it next year.

At every stage, the Government have been on the back foot and running to catch up—a point that my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), who chairs the Work and Pensions Committee, and the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) both made powerfully. When we debated the uprating, it was already in the context of rising inflation; we discussed the possibility of uprating benefits at a more up-to-date level that reflected real-world price rises, but it was found that that could not happen. There were a set of measures, including assistance with council tax, that were poorly targeted and difficult to administer.

[Ms Karen Buck]

Weeks later, the Government had to come back with a larger package of measures than would otherwise have been required.

If the Government had been able to update social security this spring to be more in line with inflation, additional assistance would undoubtedly have been needed, but we would not have required the same level of emergency package. Importantly—this is the central point—pensioners and families would have had an income in their pocket, week by week, so that they could plan and manage their finances. That would undoubtedly have been a better way for households to cope with the rising crisis than having to manage one-off emergency payments from different sources. Many of those families, because they did not get that assistance in April, even though it is only a few months later when the first of these payments will be made, will have found themselves in debt—in financial difficulty—in the interim. The debt that families get into is itself expensive. There cannot be many Members who have not been dealing with constituents who have come to them because they are facing bailiffs at their door, or are caught in payments schemes that have left them struggling with very high repayments, because of the difficulties that they have got into.

It is simply not the case that one-off payments were the only way of delivering timely support to families on means-tested benefits. While welcoming, as I said, any support—and it is a large package of support that we are considering today—it is clear that this approach is still going to lead to a lot of rough justice that would have been mitigated had a broader package of support been put in place, when there was time, through the mainstream social security system.

Entitlement to the one-off payments is triggered by receipt of one of the means-tested benefits in the month leading up to one of the qualifying days. This means that people's circumstances in just two months of the year are taken into account, so families who have the same income and face the same cost of living pressures over the course of the year could wind up being treated very differently depending on the point of the year at which they are dipping into an application for a means-tested benefit. Some will receive the initial support and some will not. The problem is that people's circumstances change all the time, not just in two months of the year, and the numbers involved are very large. For example, every three months about 1 million people of working age leave employment, becoming unemployed or economically inactive. At the moment, an even larger number move into new employment. However, it is the scale of the churn rather than the net outcome that is important. Similarly, there are about 150,000 starts on universal credit every month, the great majority due to changes in family circumstances. With families moving on and off benefits the whole time, a one-off payment that is tied to just two dates in the year is inevitably a crude approach to matching funding to need.

I am particularly concerned about how people with fluctuating incomes will fare under this policy. The Bill provides that only people in receipt of a benefit payment of at least 1p in the month leading up to the qualifying day are entitled to the one-off payment, but universal credit is supposed to adjust to fluctuations in income on

a monthly basis. Some people will be entitled to no payment in one month and payment in the next month, depending on their earnings. Indeed, one of the selling points of universal credit was that people would not have to make a new claim every time their earnings fluctuated above and below the cut-off level. It therefore seems inevitable that large numbers of people, employed and self-employed, with low and irregular incomes will be denied help under this policy in a completely arbitrary way.

The Government need to clarify what steps they intend to take to mitigate this risk. Is it really necessary to insist that only people who have actually received a payment in the month leading up to the qualifying day should receive help? Should all self-employed people whose universal credit is reduced to zero in one of those periods, solely due to the operation of the minimum income floor, be excluded from support? We have also heard about the limitations of these measures in terms of adjusting to family size. That is one of the critical ways in which delivering directly through universal credit, and indeed legacy benefits, was preferable and more sensitive to the needs of families.

Emergency and one-off measures such as those in this Bill have a place in exceptional circumstances, but they do not give people living desperately precarious lives the security they need. They do not, in many cases, match individual circumstances as the social security system does, however imperfectly. Any and all measures that help us to relieve hardship in these difficult times are welcome, but overall our social security system needs to be more fit for purpose, just as the wider economy needs to be more fit for purpose—more resilient and more productive, with decent and secure employment opportunities and investment in the future.

4.8 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (David Rutley):** I thank those who have contributed to this debate. I echo the points made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to stress the importance of this urgent legislation to support people up and down the country. The sharp increase in the cost of living is a challenge shared across the globe due to the aftershocks of covid on global supply, amplified by Russia's unacceptable invasion of Ukraine. This Bill is the flagship component of our bold package of cost of living additional payments which have been designed to help people to cope with increased costs.

We are grateful for the support of Opposition Front Benchers in facilitating the speedy progress of the legislation. It is vital that these payments get to the people who need them. I am also very grateful for the contributions that have highlighted that these are a serious response to serious challenges, such as those made by the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), as well as by my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills).

The support provided through this Bill is timely and comprehensive, and we are taking significant steps and targeting resource to support those in greatest need. The spirit of this Bill is in line with the approach that the Government have taken since the start of the pandemic, which has been shown to deliver for the people of this



country in challenging times. We will continue to work hard to help people on low incomes get the support that they need.

We have worked hard through the vaccine roll-out, through the dedication of amazing people, to reopen society, and our economy has responded positively. There are record numbers of people in payroll employment, unemployment is just 3.8%, which is around the lowest level since the 1970s, and there are 1.3 million vacancies, which we are working diligently with employers and communities to fill. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) will be pleased to know that, given his focus on work.

With all the work going on to help get people into work and progress in work, we recognise that people do need additional support in dealing with the cost of living challenges. That is why the Chancellor has set out his generous package, with another £15 billion of targeted support, which brings our total package to £37 billion this year alone. Of these additional payments, a particularly important one is the means-tested benefit that will provide a £650 one-off cost of living payment. It will be paid in two instalments to recipients entitled to qualifying means-tested benefits or tax credit. The first starts on 14 July and the second, of £324, later in the year. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) asked if there could be one payment. I understand the point she made, but we have consciously staggered the payments to help people on low incomes with their budgeting, which I hope she will welcome. The other important element of the Bill is providing disability cost of living payments of £150, which will go to 6 million people in the United Kingdom and will be paid in September.

We have deliberately kept the rules of the additional cost of living payments as simple as possible, because that is the way we can ensure that we develop the systems and processes required to make the payments at pace. I pay tribute to the hard work of officials across the Government to make that possible.

There are a number of contributions in the debate to which I need to respond. The benefit cap was raised by the right hon. Members for East Ham and for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) and also by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley. We have kept the payments very simple both for those receiving them and for Government systems. They are tax-free, they will not impact on benefit entitlement or the benefit cap, and they will be paid to people without the need for paperwork. They will be paid into people's bank accounts.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) made points about uprating. Of course, as the Secretary of State said in her speech at the start of the debate, there will be an annual review of benefits and pensions for the tax year 2023-24, which will commence in the autumn as per convention.

Some hon. Members have highlighted the legacy systems and pensions, and asked why we cannot do uprating more frequently. I think we know that the legacy systems are not that agile. Of course, what we are trying to do and working very hard to do—recognising how flexible universal credit is and how resilient it has proven through the pandemic—is to move people through to universal credit by the end of 2024.

**Sir Stephen Timms:** I want to go back to what the Minister said about the benefit cap, and I welcome the point he made. Does he recognise that, in a very high

inflation environment, there really is quite a compelling case for looking again at the level of the benefit cap for next year alongside the other benefit uprating matters?

**David Rutley:** There is a statutory duty to review benefit cap levels at least once every five years, and this will happen at the appropriate time. When the Secretary of State decides to undertake the review, she will consider the national economic situation and any other matters she considers relevant at that moment in time.

I reiterate that carer's allowance is not a means-tested benefit. Nearly 60% of working-age people on carer's allowance will get the cost of living payment as they are on means-tested benefits or disability benefits. Carer's allowance recipients will benefit from the £400 per household universal support being provided to help with the cost of energy bills.

People who receive carer's allowance may live in a household that will benefit from the Government's support package. For example, they may live with someone who receives a means-tested benefit, a disability benefit or tax credits. If so, the household will benefit from the cost of living payment.

The hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) has asked me in a number of debates why this measure does not more fully reflect different family sizes and formations. The challenge is trying to get these payments out as fast as possible. To do that, we need to get the payments out to "single benefit units," as they are described, and households. The important thing to highlight is that most low-income families will be able to receive the £150 council tax support and the energy bill support, on top of the work allowance taper and the increase in the national living wage.

It is not possible to distinguish between those who have a permanent increase in their earnings and those whose earnings are temporarily fluctuating. If a UC claimant's income subsequently falls, they will return to having a positive award after the cut-off date, and they may be eligible for the second payment.

The right hon. Member for Leicester South talked about the minimum income floor, which ensures we do not prop up unproductive employment or self-employment indefinitely. There is a start-up period to protect newly self-employed people. Beyond that, having a minimum income floor is the right policy. If it means there is a nil UC payment, the claimant would not be entitled to the means-tested payment. However, they would get the £400 energy payment and the £150 council tax rebate, and they would potentially be eligible for the household support fund. It is worth recognising that there are paid employment opportunities out there, given the high level of vacancies.

We have heard about the take-up of pension credit, and I am sitting next to the expert, the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman).

**Jonathan Ashworth:** Twinkle toes!

**David Rutley:** Whatever we want to call him, he will take this forward with aplomb, that is for sure.

There was a serious question about why the number of means-tested benefit recipients will fall in the second cost of living payment period, and it is because the projections reflect mortality rates. However, they do not

[David Rutley]

reflect the important work many of us are doing to raise awareness, so hopefully many more people will claim it.

I think I have now answered most of the questions. The hon. Member for Richmond Park asked about industrial injuries disablement benefit, on which I would be more than willing to talk to her separately. We should not underestimate the additional payments from the household support fund to help people with the cost of essentials. The Chancellor announced another £500 million in his latest statement, and it will be available from October 2022 to March 2023.

In England, the £421 million household support fund will be administered by local authorities, and the devolved Administrations will receive £79 million through the Barnett formula. Importantly, there will be new guidance to local authorities on this latest extension of the household support fund to reflect the fact that some people who are not able to secure these additional payments will be able to go to their local council to secure support.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Some household support funds ran out months earlier than expected. Does the Minister expect the new funds will be sufficient and will last as long as they are supposed to last?

**David Rutley:** The current tranche of household support fund is on top of all the other benefits we have talked about. As we have said, these are substantial additional support payments that are being made available, and the £500 million on top is there to help those people who have further needs with the cost of essentials. Further guidance will be made available.

We are working at unparalleled pace to get money into people's pockets. It is vital that we meet the deadline for Royal Assent by 30 June, after a fast-tracked passage, so that we do not create a strong risk that we fail to make payments in July. We want to make sure that the most vulnerable people in our society—people on low incomes, people with disabilities—get the payments and support that they need. As I have highlighted already, this payment package in total comes to £37 billion this

year alone. The Bill helps to deliver key elements of the support package to those who need it most. I strongly support these measures and commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Committee of the whole House (Order, this day).*

*Further proceedings on the Bill stood postponed (Order, this day).*

## SOCIAL SECURITY (ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS) BILL: MONEY

*Queen's recommendation signified.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security (Additional Payments) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) a sum not exceeding £326 to anyone who is entitled, in respect of 25 May 2022, to—

- (a) universal credit or state pension credit,
- (b) an income-based jobseeker's allowance, an income-related employment and support allowance or income support, or
- (c) working tax credit or child tax credit;

(2) a sum not exceeding £324 to anyone who is entitled, in respect of a day after 25 May 2022 and not later than 31 October 2022, to a benefit mentioned in paragraph (1);

(3) a sum which, together with any sum paid as mentioned in paragraph (1) or (2), does not exceed £650 to anyone who receives a working tax credit or child tax credit of at least £26 in the tax year 2022-23;

(4) a sum not exceeding £150 to anyone who is entitled, in respect of 25 May 2022, to—

- (a) a disability living allowance,
- (b) a personal independence payment,
- (c) an attendance allowance or a constant attendance allowance,
- (d) an adult or child disability payment,
- (e) an armed forces independence payment, or
- (f) a mobility supplement.—(Michael Tomlinson.)

*Question agreed to.*

## Social Security (Additional Payments) Bill

*Proceedings resumed (Order, this day).*

*Considered in Committee.*

[MR NIGEL EVANS *IN THE CHAIR*]

### Clause 1

MEANS-TESTED ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS: MAIN  
PAYMENTS

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr Nigel Evans):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clauses 2 to 11 stand part.

New clause 1—*Assessment of bringing forward the second qualifying date*—

‘The Treasury must publish, no later than six weeks after the day in which this Act is passed, an illustrative analysis of the impact of this Act on household incomes if the second qualifying date was no later than 1 October.’

New clause 2—*Assessment of cost of living support package*—

‘(1) The Treasury must publish, no later than the next fiscal event after the day on which this Act is passed, a full and detailed analysis of the impact of this Act on households.

(2) The Treasury may include in the analysis the effect of support for households announced in February 2022 in response to recent energy price rises.

(3) The analysis must include an estimate, based on the latest available reliable data, of the impact on household incomes of—

- (a) payments made under this Act to households on mean-tested benefits,
- (b) payments made under this Act to recipients of disability benefits.

(4) The analysis must show impacts across all deciles of household income distribution—

- (a) in cash terms, and
- (b) as proportion of net household income.

(5) The analysis must take into account where relevant differing policy contexts in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

(6) The analysis must include an assessment of the impact of this Act on households of different types, including singleparent families, larger families, and pensioner households.’

New clause 3—*Payment date*—

‘The Secretary of State and HMRC must seek to make all payment due under this Act no later than 14 July 2022.’

New clause 4—*Review of distributional effects*—

‘The Secretary of State and the Treasury must make a joint assessment of the distributional effects of this Act on—

- (a) rural communities;
- (b) families eligible for free school meals;
- (c) unpaid carers; and
- (d) households in each income decile

no later than six weeks after this Act is passed and must lay a copy of the assessment before both Houses of Parliament.’

4.21 pm

**David Rutley:** We have had a useful debate on Second Reading and I welcome the chance for more detailed examination of the Bill in Committee of the whole House. We had an extensive debate, with some probing

questions, so I will endeavour—with the support of the Opposition Front Bench and your permission, Mr Evans—to move as fast we can through the Committee stage.

Clause 1 will ensure that the £326 and £324 cost of living payments totalling £650 will be made to an individual or couple who have a qualifying entitlement to a social security benefit or tax credit. The clause also sets out the qualifying benefits and tax credits. Where a claimant is entitled to both a qualifying social security benefit and a tax credit, the social security benefit will be the qualifying benefit for the purpose of receiving a cost of living payment.

Clause 2 sets out who is eligible for the two payments that make up the £650 cost of living payment. It ensures that only those with the entitlement to a positive payment or award in respect of the passporting social security benefit or tax credit will receive a cost of living payment. The aim is to ensure that we target payments to those on the lowest incomes. The clause also defines the relevant eligibility period in relation to the qualifying days set out in clause 1.

**Nigel Mills:** The Minister will be aware that there are some situations in which an employer pays a month’s wages late, wages are paid on a four-weekly cycle and two payments are made in a month, rather than one, or a one-off bonus is paid in a certain month. Those situations could mean that someone who ordinarily gets a UC payment in a month has a month in which they are entitled to nothing. If that happened to be the month that was used for the qualifying payment in this situation, the person would miss out on the whole £326. Would the Minister be tempted to use a two-month period, so if someone gets at least 1p in either month they would get the £326, rather than risk the strange one-offs that could wipe out someone’s monthly payment?

**David Rutley:** I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. We have already talked about fluctuating earnings. The important thing here is that we have had to define these eligibility periods to be able to get the payments out speedily, and we have also made sure that there is a protection mechanism. There is a wider package of support that is available other than just the £650 cost of living means-tested benefit. There is also the further funding of the household support fund, which will help these individuals.

Clause 3 addresses the situation in which a person has a qualifying entitlement to a social security benefit or a tax credit more than once. It ensures that, where the person is entitled to both universal credit and another social security benefit, they will receive the cost of living payment as a result of their entitlement to universal credit only.

Where a claimant is entitled to both a qualifying social security benefit and a tax credit, the social security benefit will be the qualifying benefit for the purpose of receiving a cost of living payment. Where a person is entitled to both child tax credit and working tax credit, but not a qualifying social security benefit, they will receive the cost of living payment as a result of their entitlement to child tax credit only. That will ensure that a person does not receive duplicate cost of living payments irrespective of whether they have a qualifying entitlement to more than one passported social security benefit or tax credit.



[David Rutley]

Clause 4 places a duty on Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to make a cost of living payment to people whose entitlement to qualifying tax credits only becomes apparent at a later date. The clause will ensure that those people will not miss out, which is a point that has been raised by others in this debate.

Clause 5 places a duty on the Secretary of State to make a disability cost of living payment of £150 to 6 million people who receive eligibility benefit in respect of 25 May 2022. This disability cost of living payment will support disabled people with the additional costs they may face. The clause also sets out the eligible benefits, or the qualifying benefits, for this particular additional payment. To be eligible, the person must have been entitled to a payment of one of these benefits in respect of 25 May 2022.

Clause 6 confirms that the administration rules used for each cost of living payment are the same as the benefit or payment that conferred the eligibility. Clause 7 provides for co-operation between the Secretary of State, the Department for Work and Pensions and HMRC in the delivery of cost of living payments. The scale and scope of the measure also require collaboration with other colleagues across government. Together, the bodies set out in the clause ensure that the intended recipients of the cost of living support are paid. There is a need to have data sharing to minimise the risk of duplicate payments and to support operational delivery.

On clause 8, some important points have been raised on this already on Second Reading. It ensures that the cost of living payments are disregarded for the purposes of tax and social security. I can confirm that the cost of living and the disability cost of living payments are exempt from tax. Payments will not affect a person's entitlement to social security benefits or tax credits, either as capital or as income. I can also confirm that the payments will not be subject to the benefit cap.

**Nigel Mills:** When my hon. Friend says that they will be disregarded as capital, does that mean that, if somebody quite prudently puts the money in the bank and saves for their high energy bills in the winter, that would not take them over the £16,000 savings limit for universal credit? Effectively, they could ignore not just the receipt of the income, but that part of their savings as well if they were to treat them in that way.

**David Rutley:** Just to clarify, yes. That is the important thing. The clause ensures that every person who is entitled to a cost of living payment receives every penny, as all Members across the Chamber will want to see.

Clause 9 sets out the definition and interpretation of certain terms used in the Bill. Clause 10 explains the procedures for laying the regulations, previously referred to under the powers contained in clause 1(4), to specify the qualifying day for the second cost of living payment, which will be no later than 31 October, and clause 6(5), to apply and disapply regulations around the administration of payments, including overpayments and recovery, as is required. These provisions ensure that regulations made under the Bill can enable the efficient delivery of the second payment in the autumn. Finally, clause 11 defines the territorial extent of the Bill, whose provisions

extend to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This ensures that the payments will be payable throughout the United Kingdom.

4.30 pm

With your permission, Mr Evans, I will now deal with the new clauses. New clauses 1 to 4 have been tabled by, respectively, the right hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) and the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine). New clause 1 requires the Government to publish an analysis of the impact on household incomes of an earlier backstop date

"if the second qualifying date was no later than 1 October."

Let me, for the purpose of clarity, assure Members that the Bill does not set out the qualifying date for the second payment. Instead, it states that the Secretary of State will lay further regulations to specify the eligibility dates for the second cost of living payment, worth £324, and that the date selected for this will be earlier than 31 October. As previously stated, announcing the qualifying date for the second payment now would risk increasing the level of fraudulent applications for benefits, and disincentivise reporting of changes of circumstances.

New clauses 2 and 4 require the Government to publish an analysis evaluating the impacts on households of the payments provided under the Bill. The Treasury has already published detailed analysis of the impact of the main February support packages. Its distributional analysis document shows that the support packages are "highly progressive"—a point that has been made today by Members on both sides of the Committee—with lower-income households benefiting significantly more than those with higher incomes, both in cash terms and in terms of a share of income. As a result, further publications are not necessary. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that the Government support means that, on average, the poorest households will be approximately compensated for the rising cost of living this year, and the Resolution Foundation has said that the May 2022 support package is—again—"highly progressive", with households in the bottom quintile seeing an average cash gain of £1,195.

New clause 3 requires the Secretary of State and HMRC to attempt to make all payments covered by the Bill before 14 July 2022. This does not acknowledge the deliberately staggered nature of the cost of living payment and the disability cost of living payment. As I have said previously, issuing the cost of living payment in two instalments provides a key safety net in the policy to help the households that are most vulnerable to the rising costs with their budgeting. This approach also ensures that any new eligible claimants will benefit from the second payment, worth £324, even if they do not receive the £326 payment. It also does not allow people to be paid when they become retrospectively eligible. Furthermore, the new arrangements required for all the payments would simply not be deliverable by 14 July. The new clause would therefore result in payment errors, and amounts might then need to be recovered. That would cause distress or confusion to the recipient, and would also be a large extra cost to the taxpayer.

Given that a published distributional analysis of the impact of the announcements already exists, and that new clause 3 would threaten successful delivery of the payments, I hope that Members will not press their new clauses.

**Ms Buck:** I thank the Minister for that introduction. There is clearly no need for me to cover the points that we discussed on Second Reading, but I will make a few comments about new clauses 1 and 2.

As the Minister said, the Bill as drafted states that the second qualifying date is to be no later than the 31st of October, which allows for a span of several weeks during which the date could be set. In her introductory remarks, the Secretary of State talked about the need to keep that open because of the potential behavioural impact. It would be helpful if the Minister told us a little about why the Department reached that conclusion.

As we know, families and household are looking for clarity. We expect the energy cap to rise significantly again in the autumn, and there is real fear and anxiety in the country about what energy price inflation, and general inflation, are doing to household incomes. People are looking for certainty, and the sooner they are able to know exactly when their qualifying period will be and when the payment will be made, the better it will be for those families. It would also be helpful for us to know what the implications are of a qualifying date that could be one month early, so as to cover the span of options for that date. Although, we will not be seeking to press these amendments to a vote, can the Minister advise on whether he will be able to pick up that point and come back to us with answers?

New clause 2 would address the distribution and the equality impact assessment. We have indeed had some analysis from the Treasury, and we have had some looks at the economic distributional impact and the decile impact. As we would expect from measures heavily directed towards means-tested benefits, they are indeed progressive, and that is absolutely right, but the single most important topic that we discussed in the short Second Reading was the downside of single payments that are household unit payments and therefore do not reflect differences in household composition. The impact assessment does not give us that information, and it is critical that we have it, so I will press the Minister on the point. We need a much fuller assessment of what the Treasury expects to be the impact of a reliance on single payments, rather than an accurate updating within the benefits system. We also need, as soon as possible after the first payments have been made, an assessment of the actual impact in terms of the distribution.

Household composition is probably the single most important of the areas of analysis that we need to track. It is the one that is worrying people the most and where the disparity between a direct payment through the social security system and a one-off payment is most marked. We want to see analysis that looks at different recipient groups and at the impact on pensioners, on people with disabilities, on families, on single people and on working people of the distribution of the payments as they go out. It would be helpful also to look at how different working groups are affected, such as the self-employed, who we have discussed, and working households as opposed to households on out-of-work benefits.

The other area on which I will spend a couple of minutes in the context of analysis is the various payments that have been distributed through local government and how we can look at their impact. The Minister has repeated that his principal aim was to try and get benefit payments out as quickly as possible to those who need them most. In fact, the February announcement

of the distribution of income through local authorities, through council tax, does the exact opposite. As I am sure he is aware, local authorities have had to go to the considerable length of writing to every household that pays council tax other than through direct debit, wait for them to respond, wait for them to provide information confirming who they are and their entitlement, and then to send the payment out. That of course means that large numbers of people reliant on that £150 have not yet had it, and it is likely to be weeks and weeks still before those families actually get the payment.

The payment requires people to deal with official correspondence, and I do not know whether Ministers have seen some of the letters that have gone out from local authorities, but I certainly have, and I struggle to understand them. A number of those forms have gone out without any reference to people on council tax support, for example, so people do not know that they are likely to be covered by the scheme. It is important therefore that we understand a distributional impact of the household support funds and of the distribution of funds by local authorities.

The Government have been keen to stress the value of those schemes, that they are locally sensitive and that local government has an important role to play in delivering them. That may be the case, but as the Opposition have said all along, it is undoubtedly a more complex and bureaucratic system for delivering help into people's hands than uprating and delivering that directly through the social security system. Given what we know about inflation and energy costs soaring and the likelihood that we will have to return to this place to consider more emergency support later in the year, it is critical that we understand exactly how the delivery of the Government's support package affects people, who it affects and whether it is the best way to provide help to people in need.

**Kirsty Blackman:** I have a few things to say about the specifics of the Bill and the points that have been raised in the debate. I understand the Minister's point about the second qualifying date and the Secretary of State's earlier point about not wanting to make clear what that is. I will not argue with that, but I have a question about the timelines for the payment.

We had a qualifying date of 27 May and we are looking at the payment being made on 14 July, which is a significant lag. If there is a similar length of time between the second qualifying date and that additional payment, people may not get it until nearly Christmas. The Minister was clear that the support is being given in two payments partly to help with budgeting, and people would like some certainty about the dates on which the payments will be made. I will not press him on the qualifying date; as I said, I do not necessarily disagree with the choice to not publish that now and to bring it forward through negative delegated legislation, which makes some sense.

The other issue for people relates to the other payments that they may be able to receive. We have heard from the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) that people have not necessarily received a council tax payment and do not know when they might receive that money. For people who are struggling now, it would help to have some certainty about when the payments will come. I do not think the legislation has even been

[Kirsty Blackman]

brought forward for the £400 for energy bills; I am not aware when that will happen or when those dates will be. The Government are saying that there will be £1,200 for some families, and it would be really helpful for people to know when they are likely to receive that potential income so that they can plan.

On the negative resolution that will be brought forward to set the second qualifying date, I assume that we are not likely to see that until after the summer recess. If the Minister can confirm that that is the case, it would be helpful for us to understand that. If he cannot do that, that is fine.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) talked about people who get two payments in a month, because they are paid on a four-weekly basis or because they receive bonuses or anything of that sort. It would be helpful if the Minister, when he sets the second qualifying date, tries to ensure that it is not in a cycle that will disadvantage the same people twice. If the date means that people whose universal credit is paid on a cyclical basis—for a significant number of people, it is clear that there is a regular cycle every three months—lose out on the £324 and the £326, even though they are regular universal credit claimants over the year, I would be concerned that the Government were not doing that in the right way. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion of doing it over a two-month period would probably have been a better way to do it than the way that the Government are proposing. As was stated, if further additional cost of living payments need to be made to people in future, perhaps it would be helpful for the Minister to consider that.

In the context of making payments too quickly, the Minister mentioned the recovery of incorrect payments and how that might work, or need to work. He said that if payments are made too quickly, people might receive a payment that they are not entitled to and then it would need to be clawed back. Given how he phrased that, I am slightly concerned that we might end up with people through no fault of their own receiving payments in error that they think they are entitled to, who then have them clawed back from future payments from the DWP. We have seen that over the years with tax credits and how people are still paying back legacy benefit overpayments that they received, and we have seen the pain and suffering that that can cause people.

4.45 pm

Obviously, the Government will make some errors in these payments, right? We cannot have a 100% error-free system, and I would be concerned if they were to claw back money from people who genuinely thought that they were entitled to it. That could have an even worse impact on their cost of living than the current crisis. Will the Minister explain, if he can at this point, what is likely to happen should someone receive a payment in error, through no fault of their own, had they expected to receive it and not known that it was an accident? Will that be clawed back by the Government, or will they write it off and say, "Look, we made a mistake. You can keep it because it was our error, not yours, and we don't want to put you through additional pain"?

I will have more comments to make and questions to ask on Third Reading, but those are my questions and comments on the substance of the clauses in the Bill.

One last thing: I thank the Government for including the Scottish payments for disability in the eligibility criteria. In Scotland, we are doing our best to have an excellent social security system on the basis of dignity and respect, and I appreciate the UK Government working with the Scottish Government to ensure that people in receipt of Scottish disability payments will also get the additional £150.

**David Rutley:** I am grateful for the contributions made; I will respond to them briefly. On Scottish qualifying benefits, yes, individuals will be able to receive the £150. As for the second payment, we are having to be careful in setting out the details definitively because of fraudulent behaviour. We certainly saw that with other payments made during the pandemic, so, now that we know the levels of fraud going on around benefits, we cannot be as explicit as perhaps we might have been. However, I assure hon. Members that consideration of the regulations on the second payment will take place after recess.

The other point made was about the timing of cycles. That is important, and we will do everything that we can to ensure that the cycles do not align, so that people who may not have been able to qualify for the first payment will be able to qualify. It will be difficult, because we are moving at extreme pace and with huge volumes of claimants, but we will do everything we can to assist those individuals.

It is not often that the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) says things that I completely support and agree with, but she did on this occasion. All of us, and particularly the Government, need to do a lot more on communication about these payments. There are lots of them, and they are targeted, so there is a duty on us to communicate clearly when these things are going to happen. However, there are reasons why we cannot be as clear on the timing of the second payment.

I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) on household composition. Sometimes, it would be great to have more data in these situations, but we have produced an impact analysis—that is not always the case in these situations—to ensure that colleagues can understand what is available for their constituents at constituency level. We have also seen the distribution analysis that looks at comparator groups. That is really important data, and I think that it helps to paint a pretty broad picture of how these payments will help vulnerable and low-income families across the United Kingdom.

The household support fund will indeed ensure that we can provide support to people with the cost of essentials. It is vital that local authorities do the work and report back to Government on the work that they have been doing. I hope that, with those points, I have made the case for hon. Members not to press their new clauses.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 2 to 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.*

*Bill reported, without amendment.*

*Third Reading*



4.50 pm

**David Rutley:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank the DWP Bill team and the cross-Government officials who have stood up to deliver this legislation and the payment mechanisms at pace. I also thank the House authorities, parliamentary staff, Clerks, Doorkeepers and Members across the House who have participated in today's debates.

The Bill reflects the Government's commitment to supporting low-income households and disabled people across the United Kingdom. Due to the current economic circumstances, many people need additional support to alleviate the financial pressures caused by the cost of living challenge. That is why this Government are providing a significant package of support worth £37 billion this year alone. It includes a £150 council tax rebate in England, £400 of support through the energy bills support scheme, a £650 cost of living payment for people entitled to qualifying means-tested benefits, a £150 disability cost of living payment for people entitled to a qualifying disability payment, and £300 in additional support for pensioners through a top-up to winter fuel payments. In practice this means people in receipt of UC or another qualifying means-tested benefit could receive £1,200 in additional support, which could increase to £1,350 if an individual also receives a qualifying disability benefit.

The Bill provides the Government with the necessary powers to administer the £650 cost of living payment and the £150 disability cost of living payment. These payments will provide targeted support to 8 million people including some pensioners and 6 million disabled people. We want to ensure these payments are in people's bank accounts as soon as possible. We intend to begin phasing in payments from 14 July, subject to the Bill securing Royal Assent on 30 June.

This Bill is a further demonstration of the action this Government are taking to support people across the country and I commend it to the House.

4.52 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth:** I join the Minister in thanking the Clerks, the Bill team and Members across the House who have spoken, and I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for guiding us to what looks like an early finish with skill, as always. I also thank the Minister for the courtesy with which he has responded to the queries Members have raised; I did not always agree or get the answer I wanted, but I appreciate the way in which he engaged, with great detail and politely endeavouring to answer all points.

As I said on Second Reading, we do not intend to stand in the way of this Bill at all; we totally understand the need for the Secretary of State to make arrangements for these payments to be delivered swiftly, although we believe that the Government should have acted sooner. The result of not acting sooner has been considerable anxiety and hardship for many of our constituents, many of whom have already had to grapple with the £20 cut to universal credit and other measures such as the pernicious two-child policy over many years.

Many Members have raised the various hard edges still in place because of the flat-payment nature of the legislation. One way of dealing with that would have been by bringing forward a benefit uprating, and it is curious that Ministers told us that that was not possible,

given that it was done in 1975 by the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Services, Barbara Castle, who said that two upratings in a year would be introduced because of exceptionally high rates of inflation. If they could do it in 1975, it is curious that we cannot do it 40-odd years later. The position of the Conservative party in those days was that uprating should happen twice a year. That was Norman Fowler's position.

I was grateful to the Secretary of State for what she said in response to my question about the uprating for next year. With respect to the triple lock and the uprating of other pensions, we have heard from the Chancellor that they will be uprated in line with figures in September, but we can see the pressure that is being put on the Government by some voices in the media and so on. The Secretary of State said that those matters would be reviewed, as per the legislation. I hope that does not turn out to be a get-out clause for the Government on the triple lock and benefit uprating later this year. We will be watching these issues like a hawk.

Our big worry, although we will not stand in the way of the Bill, is that the Government still have no serious plan to deal with the ravages of inflation. There has been debate across the Chamber today about the second payment, but with inflation where it is today, that second payment, if paid in November or December, would, by my rough calculation, in real terms lose value from the £324 that the Government are legislating for to about £307 because of the levels of inflation. I fear that, unless the Government get a grip of inflation, they will have to come back to the House with an autumn statement or another emergency Budget, to pursue other measures to help some of the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.

We will not divide the House tonight. We welcome the legislation as far as it goes, but I fear that further help will be needed very soon.

4.56 pm

**Kirsty Blackman:** I also join in the thanks, particularly to the Clerks' team, who have been incredibly helpful, as ever. I expect nothing less, and have never received anything less from the House of Commons staff; they are always excellent. I also echo the Minister's thanks to all those in DWP and HMRC who will be working so hard; we appreciate the additional work that it will mean, and has already meant, to get these things in place. We are massively supportive of all those staff who will be doing a really difficult job, and potentially working an awful lot, in order to pull this off. That is massively appreciated.

The provisions in the Bill, although welcome, although additional and although they go towards the cost of living, do not cover the cost of living increases that our constituents face. They do not even cover the energy price increases, never mind the inflation on the most basic foods which people just have to buy. You cannot get away without buying pasta, rice or bread. People are stuck with the massive price increases in those foods; they have to buy those things. There has already been a time lag—people are not getting the payments today, although I appreciate that they are getting them quickly—and people will already be feeling the squeeze and struggling. The £326 on the horizon is great; it is helpful, but it is not enough. It does not provide the level of

[Kirsty Blackman]

support that uprating benefits in April could have provided, which would have helped with that squeeze resulting from the cost of living.

The one really big thing that the Government could do today to make a massive difference to people's lives would be to put up the pretend living wage to a real living wage—a wage that people can actually live on. That is reserved to Westminster—the Scottish Government do not have the powers to do that—and it would make a difference to people. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) was talking about the hard work that his constituents do and the amount of money that people get on benefits. The thing is that 40% of the people on universal credit are in work. A huge number of the people going to food banks and their children are in households with at least one parent in work. I get that the Government want to get people into work, but people are in work and still cannot afford to live. They still have to have this top-up from the Government. The Government can help to fix that problem by increasing the minimum wage to a real living wage and giving it to everybody who is over 18, removing the inherent ageism.

The other thing that the Government have missed and failed on in this Bill relates to people who have no recourse to public funds. Those people are, by definition, missed. That is the intention of what the Government are doing, but we can see that the most destitute, desperate people in our society are those who have no recourse to public funds. The Bill fails to provide support to anybody who is not on the gateway benefits or to anybody who is struggling but does not fit into the criteria. This is particularly acute when people have no recourse to public funds. We are seeing children literally starving because their parents have no recourse to public funds. Some of these cases involve people who are fleeing domestic abuse and are not eligible for the destitution domestic violence concession because they are, for example, an EU citizen or because their partner was a student. There are a lot of problems with this.

Another thing that is missing is that we do not know when we are going to get the legislation on the pensioner cost of living payments. If the Minister could let us know when that legislation is coming, that would be very helpful. Could he also let us know when we are going to get the energy bills support scheme legislation? This Bill is only part of the package. We have been discussing the whole package, but this legislation only brings in a bit of it. The right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) asked me earlier where the money was going to come from to pay for all this, but we do not yet have any legislation on the charges that are going to be made on the energy companies. If we could just have had a timeline for when we could expect that legislation to come in, we would not have been in this situation, with this Bill appearing a week before we go through every single process in the Bill. MPs need longer to look at these other pieces of legislation that are coming through, and if the Government could do anything to ensure that we get even slightly more time to scrutinise the legislation as it comes in, that would be appreciated. As I have said, I thank the Government for bringing forward this package, but it is not enough. They need to go further, and they need to uprate benefits and backdate that to April, but we welcome this package.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

*Ordered,*

That, at this day's sitting—

(1) the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion in the name of Mark Spencer relating to the Speaker's Conference not later than one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this order; such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; and the business may be proceeded with, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and

(2) Standing Order No. 41A (deferred divisions) shall not apply to either the business relating to the Speaker's Conference or to the business relating to the Committee on Standards.—  
(*Michael Tomlinson.*)

## Speaker's Conference

5.3 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mark Spencer):** I beg to move,

That this House considers that it is desirable to consider the employment conditions of Members' staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment, and accordingly agrees that the following Order be made:

(1) There shall be a committee to be known as the Speaker's Conference which shall consist of the Speaker, who shall be Chair, and up to 14 other Members appointed by the Speaker.

(2) The Speaker shall appoint one or more of the members of the Conference to act as vice-Chair in his absence.

(3) The Conference shall consider and make recommendations upon the contractual arrangements for the employment of Members' staff.

(4) Notwithstanding any Standing Order of this House, the Conference shall conduct its proceedings in such manner as the Speaker shall determine.

(5) The Conference, and any sub committees thereof that the Speaker shall appoint, shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House and to adjourn from place to place;

(b) to report from time to time;

(c) to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(6) The Conference shall produce its first report to the House, which shall include a description of the principles underpinning its work, no later than 31 October 2022.

(7) The quorum of the Conference shall be five.

(8) This Order shall have effect until the end of the current Parliament.

I bring forward the motion on behalf of Mr Speaker to establish a Speaker's Conference to consider and make recommendations on the employment conditions of members of staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment. The treatment and safety of those who work on the estate is paramount, and I pay tribute to Mr Speaker for bringing this matter to the forefront of our attention today. I commend him for working across parties and across the House to make sure that this motion was brought before us in the House today.

As all Members will be aware, under our current system, individual MPs are responsible for the employment of their own staff. This is a long-standing practice. The Speaker's Conference will be able to consider whether this remains appropriate. I do not seek to answer that question today, and I do not think this is the moment to debate it, but, should the House agree to today's motion and the accompanying memorandum from the Clerk of the House, the conference will approach this task without any preconceptions.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): Paragraph 6 stipulates:

"The conference shall produce its first report to the House...no later than 31 October 2022."

In view of the fact that there are two scheduled parliamentary recesses between now and that date, does my right hon. Friend not think that that is rather ambitious?

**Mark Spencer:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. That would be an interim report. It is my understanding that Mr Speaker would draw the Committee together, and establish a narrative and what it is looking at. I think the report would be an early opportunity for Members to get a sense of the Committee's direction of travel.

Hon. Members will be aware that Speaker's Conferences are not common. I think the most recent one was in 2008, which is before I and many other Members were elected to this place. It was established to look at the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in this place. It proved to make progress in that direction. I hope that this Speaker's Conference will be as effective as the 2008 conference. It will be a Committee of the House of Commons, so it will have the powers and legal protections that that entails. That will ensure that it can secure any evidence it needs and that evidence will be given to it freely.

**Angela Richardson** (Guildford) (Con): On paragraph 5(a), which talks about powers, is it my right hon. Friend's understanding that Members of Parliament and current members of staff will be fully consulted in that process?

**Mark Spencer:** I would fully expect that the Speaker's Conference will take representations from Members. Once we are aware of which Members are on the Committee—I encourage my hon. Friend to make representations to the Whips Office if she wants to be considered—all Members will be able to feed into the process.

The Speaker's Conference will include Mr Speaker and 14 other Members. Mr Speaker will appoint those Members with regard to party representation. He will have full discussions with party representatives to give them the opportunity to feed those names in. As the motion sets out, the Speaker's Conference will have the powers enjoyed by all other Select Committees. As I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), it will report its preliminary findings no later than 31 October. As was the case with the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme, which was set up for the employment of Members and staff, it is ultimately a matter for this House to decide how we progress.

I pay tribute to my predecessors, my right hon. Friends the Members for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom), who made great strides in establishing the ICGS. It provided a dedicated independent mechanism for the handling of complaints of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct.

The Speaker's Conference will be an opportunity to improve the working culture and to continue to make progress in that direction. The Government have made it clear that there is no place in this building or in this Parliament for bullying, harassment or sexual harassment. As Leader of the House, I am determined that we do all we can to ensure that that does not happen. With cross-party support, working together in this House, I think we can make great progress.

Should the House agree to establish the Speaker's Conference, I would like to take this opportunity to wish Mr Speaker well in his endeavours. It will be a beneficial change, promoting positive working environments. I offer the House my full support in its progress.



5.8 pm

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): I, too, very much welcome the motion on the Speaker's Conference and thank Mr Speaker for his leadership on this matter. It offers us all an opportunity to consider the employment conditions of Members' staff. This is the right time to be doing that, following another damaging few months for the reputation of this House when we have had serious allegations and convictions against some Members. It is not a very large number, but it is important that we ensure we are providing good working practices for all Members' staff. This is a really important step forward.

Since Gemma White's report into the bullying and harassment of MPs' staff, the House has made a lot of progress in how we employ, manage and treat our staff, providing them with a form of redress, complaint and assessment of those complaints, but we now need to take further steps. For instance, we have had the establishment of the Members' Services Team, to whom I pay great tribute. I have always found them to be extremely helpful and approachable, and they are a fount of knowledge. I urge colleagues who may not have come across the team to make use of the fact that they are camped out in the Portcullis House atrium every day. They offer a friendly face, and help awaits. Members now have access to a range of best practice employment guides, and the opportunity to attend regular workshops. Again, all Members are encouraged to use the service, but we need to build on it and strengthen our structures and processes.

I want to place on record the fact that some Members have expressed concern that the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority will be the body that ends up employing Members' staff. The point of the conference is to look at all reasonable options, but it is important to put on record that my understanding—I am not speaking on behalf of IPSA—is that IPSA has expressed reservations about whether that would be appropriate. I certainly feel that, at the moment, we have other options to consider, which is what the conference is for.

In response to the question from the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) and the Leader of the House's answer, I reiterate that the motion specifies the date of the first report—not the second, third or final report—as 31 October, but it is important that the House is able to debate the reports at regular intervals and to scrutinise the work being done. As the Leader of the House mentioned, the Speaker's Conference will have cross-party membership. It will take on Select Committee powers and will have the power to require evidence, witness statements and information to be prepared for it in the same way as a Select Committee, which I think is right. The Leader of the House also mentioned—I would echo this—that the previous Speaker's Conference marked a point on which we have made much progress, because having a Speaker's Conference on increasing diversity in ethnic and gender representation in this place has been followed by a marked increase in all of the above. I feel that this bodes well for the next Speaker's Conference.

The House of Commons is a beacon for democracy around the world. I feel that we have in our hands the opportunity to make it also a model workplace that is at the forefront of workers' rights, with strong protections in place for all our staff, because future generations

should inherit a safer and more inclusive Parliament where everyone has somewhere to turn, and where staff are able to fulfil their potential in every single team across this House.

5.12 pm

**Dame Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's motion and his support for the Speaker's Conference. By definition, organisations are completely dependent on the individuals who comprise them, so having good employment conditions and a respectful working environment is essential to make sure that we attract the best people to this place. We need to get this right not only because it is important for our staff in constituency offices, but—going to the point raised by the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire)—because it is important for the way Parliament is viewed. It is really important that we are viewed as being the best place in the world for democratic freedoms and rights, and for putting in place the best legislation possible. Having the best people here, and treating them well, has to be part of that.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will wholeheartedly agree that issues to do with employment law are incredibly complex and difficult, which is why I was particularly pleased to see that paragraph 5(c) of the motion states that there is a power to appoint legal advisers. I hope that the Committee does that and gets the best legal advice, because it is very easy for all of us to think that we know how to change things, but we have to make sure that there are no unintended consequences as a result of any lack of expertise. Although a number of Members are experts in employment law in their own right, independent advice will be important.

The other important factor to consider is that things have changed hugely in the past two years: not only did an enormous number of new Members of Parliament come to the House in 2019, but covid has resulted in a huge spike in the constituency work that our offices undertake. In recognition of that, IPSA has increased the funding for constituency work, but my office staff have drawn it to my attention that there is not necessarily more space for them, particularly if they are located in London. It will be important for the conference to look more broadly at the conditions in which our staff work, as well as at anything to do with their employment contracts.

Most importantly, these are matters for Members, and Mr Speaker is absolutely right to constitute a committee of Members to look at it. I would argue that we should be looking at many other issues, and perhaps a little more regularly; the last Speaker's Conference came together in 2008. Employment practices in the outside world change regularly, and hon. Members have to ensure that we stay abreast of those changes. We are in control of how this place is run, as we are often told, but we do not always have the methods to bring in the necessary changes. House Committees meet, but they do not necessarily cover all the issues—they certainly do not cover issues relating to Members' staff—and there is no way for those Committees to co-ordinate and work together. I hope that the Speaker's Conference will look at that.

I have a few comments for the Leader of the House, one of which my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Angela Richardson) has already covered. First, we must

ensure that there is consultation with Members and staff; that is not explicit in the motion, but it must be implicit. Secondly, IPSA must be required to work with the conference, because it is essential that it has a central role in providing, in an accurate and timely manner, the information that members of the conference need.

Thirdly, the Leader of the House may not be aware that the Administration Committee, under the extremely expert chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker), is undertaking an inquiry into, among other things, the issues for Members who leave this place, voluntarily or otherwise. In the evidence that we have so far taken, we have all been struck by how often the treatment of staff has come up as a real, deep concern among Members leaving this place. That includes the treatment of staff by IPSA, I have to say, and even the treatment of staff more generally in the House.

I hope that the Leader of the House will therefore use his good offices to ensure that the conference looks carefully at the findings in the Administration Committee's report, as well as at other matters that have been set out. We would be letting our staff down if we did not try to ensure that the two things complement each other and that there is a read-across.

5.17 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for moving the motion. I congratulate Mr Speaker on considering the issue and ensuring that we all have the opportunity to consider the environment and working arrangements for staff members in this House. This is a key time for that, for many reasons that have already been given—not least that there are 650 Members and we are all pretty different in how we arrange our offices and our staff complements.

It has always struck me that many of us—I include myself—came to the House with no experience whatever of managing staff or making sure that we have a staff complement who are available and ready to do very complex and demanding work. That work has only got more demanding over the past two years, so a service that could take account of everybody across the House would be welcome, not just for Members of Parliament but for staff.

I welcome the fact that the conference will take the form of a Select Committee, a format that is very familiar to the House. In the Members' survey, I think the Select Committee process came second for satisfaction because of how Members relate to the Select Committee structure. I am glad that the conference will be able to work on that basis, which will give it the opportunity to get a whole range of evidence; I am sure that it will consider many requests to give evidence and will hear from the widest range of voices.

The motion reads:

"That this House considers that it is desirable to consider the employment conditions of Members' staff".

The key word is "consider"—so important that it is clumsily included twice in one sentence—but this is what it is about. No decision has been made. The conference is a Committee that will consider all the different aspects of the issue. It is incumbent on all Members to ensure that their views are heard, so I urge them to get in touch with the Whips and the Members who will be serving on the Committee.

The conference is a good innovation, which the whole House will welcome. There is a huge opportunity for whoever is on the Committee and all the political parties of the House to design and craft the type of working arrangements that best suit the unique environment in which we all work.

I welcome the conference, and look forward to working with it as a member of the House of Commons Commission and to looking at its considered work when we see its first report in October.

5.20 pm

**Mark Spencer:** I will respond briefly. I thank hon. Members for taking the trouble to turn up today and for contributing. I also respond on behalf of Mr Speaker in saying that, yes, the conference will have the powers of a Select Committee, so of course it will consult with Members. I am sure that Mr Speaker will read the debate in *Hansard* and take on board many of the comments made by hon. Members.

I specifically pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Dame Maria Miller), who has done a great deal of work in this area and has a lot of expertise to offer. Whether she is a member of the Committee or a witness appearing before it, I am sure that the Speaker's Conference will take note of her expertise, which will be of huge benefit.

On the remit of the Committee, I do not want to box Mr Speaker in. I want to allow the Committee to establish what it looks at and in what order, and I am sure that will be brought forward and agreed in due course. I am delighted to commend the motion to the House and am grateful to Members who have contributed to the debate.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I am certain that Mr Speaker will be paying extreme attention to all that has been said in this short debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS

*Ordered,*

That, in accordance with Standing Order No. 149A, Victoria Smith be appointed as a lay member of the Committee on Standards for a period of six years, with immediate effect.—  
(*Mark Spencer.*)

## PETITION

### Post box in Hayfield

5.22 pm

**Robert Lorgan** (High Peak) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Hayfield and local councillor, Eva Lawson, calling on Royal Mail to install an accessible post box in the village. At present, residents have to rely on the post box inside the post office, and when the post office is closed they are forced to cross the busy A624 dual carriageway to access any other post box, causing lots of issues for the elderly, disabled and families with small children.

The petition, organised by the very hard-working Councillor Eva Lawson, has been signed by hundreds of villagers. The petitioners request

"that the House of Commons urge the Government to note the need for an additional post box in Hayfield, recognise the benefits this would bring for local residents, walkers and holidaymakers, and urge Royal Mail to install a new post box."

[Robert Largan]

*Following is the full text of the petition:*

*[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

*Declares that the lack of an accessible post box in Hayfield restricts access to postal services for local residents; and further that it requires them to cross the busy A624 to access the nearest post box when the Post Office is closed – potentially endangering the elderly, disabled, and families with small children.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to note the need for an additional post box in Hayfield, recognise the benefits this would bring for local residents, walkers and holidaymakers, and urge Royal Mail to install a new post box.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

[P002741]

## VAT on Defibrillators

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Steve Double.)*

5.23 pm

**Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con): It must be every parent's worst nightmare. Last September, Dylan Rich—a talented 17-year-old footballer from Rushcliffe—was playing in a FA youth cup game between his club, West Bridgford Colts, and Boston United at the Colts' ground in Regatta Way. Out of nowhere a couple of minutes into the match, he suffered a cardiac arrest and collapsed. His brave mother Anna performed CPR on her own son. Dylan was treated with a defibrillator at the scene and an ambulance arrived within 10 minutes. He regained cardiac output and was stabilised in intensive care, but tragically he died three days later in hospital.

Words cannot express the depth of sorrow that his death has caused—to his family, his friends, and the community at West Bridgford Colts. In their tribute to him, the Colts said:

“Dylan was one of those players that team mates love for his commitment, coaches for his attitude and adaptability, and supporters for his reliability. A fantastic club player.”

Tributes followed from Nottingham Forest and Notts County. Ahead of their World cup qualifier against Poland, the England players held up a shirt with “For Dylan” printed on it.

But the tribute that his family and his club most want is to increase the number of defibrillators across the UK, to make them cheaper for communities to buy, and to increase people's awareness and confidence in using them. Until Dylan's death, I had never looked at the figures for the scale of cardiac arrests. Sudden cardiac arrest is one of the leading causes of death in young people, and almost never has any prior symptoms. Officially, about 32,000 sudden cardiac arrests occur in England every year. When combined with figures from across the UK, it is estimated that the true number is as high as 60,000. There is an important caveat to this figure: it only includes incidents where resuscitation was attempted. In the UK, only 8% of people survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest.

Cardiac arrest can happen to anyone. This was brought home to us again in Nottinghamshire last month, when 13-year-old Samuel Akwasi collapsed from a cardiac arrest during a Young Elizabethan football league game and tragically later died in Queen's Medical Centre. In fact, only yesterday, as I was writing this speech, I read of an assistant referee, Andrew Jarvis, who suffered a cardiac arrest while officiating at a game in Mansfield last August. Mercifully, he survived. He says he was saved by good-quality CPR, the football club's defibrillator, and the quick arrival of the air ambulance team.

On average, as I said, a person in the UK has an 8% chance of surviving a cardiac arrest if it happens out of hospital, but this is vastly increased to as high as 70% if a defibrillator is used within the first three to five minutes of the cardiac arrest occurring. Conversely, survival rates drop by 10% for every minute of delay after this time. This further highlights why it is essential to have a defibrillator on every sports pitch and street corner possible—because these machines save lives. Average survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests vary across the country, ranging from 0.6% to 25%. The Government



are doing so much to address regional inequality across the country, but we must also address regional inequality in defibrillator access and survival rates.

The main barriers to accessing defibrillators have been shown to be cost and awareness. In a survey by Vitreous World, 42% of people said that cost was the main barrier to owning a defibrillator, while 62% of people do not know how to use one and 27% are worried about how to do so. Defibrillators vary in cost, but the average unit is about £1,250. This is a considerable expense to many community groups, charities and sports clubs, especially considering that a sizeable portion of it, 20%, is VAT. Clearly, £1,250 is a lot of money for organisations raising funds through cake sales, individual donations and raffles. Some charities are exempt from paying VAT on defibrillators: not-for-profit hospitals, charitable institutions that provide care or medical or surgical treatment for disabled people, and rescue or first aid services. However, most sports clubs and community groups do not qualify.

There are several options for reducing the cost of defibrillators. The first is to apply a zero rate of VAT to all defibrillators in line with that already applied to a range of medicines and medical products, including prescription medicines and drugs. A blanket rate would be a simple and straightforward solution to cover anyone and any organisation wanting to buy a defibrillator.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this debate. I declare an interest, as I presented the Automated External Defibrillators (Public Access) Bill on Monday, when you were in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it will be heard on 9 September. I encourage the hon. Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) to come along to support the Bill, if at all possible.

I understand that children's car seats, children's travel systems and other safety protections have a reduced 5% rate of VAT. Should not this reduction, at least, be replicated for lifesaving defibrillators? As I know from my constituency, this would save lives.

**Ruth Edwards:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his Bill, and I would be delighted to join him on 9 September. He has come up with an excellent option that is not on my list.

I accept there are many good candidates for zero-rate or reduced-rate VAT, one of which the hon. Gentleman has just outlined, and I am sure the Minister will say that the Government have received £50 billion-worth of requests for VAT relief since the EU referendum, which is a valid point. Our tax base funds the public services on which we all rely, including NHS treatment for victims of cardiac arrest, but surely these lifesaving devices should be a higher priority than, say, e-books, of which I am a great fan but they cannot save a life in the event of cardiac arrest.

There is a good argument that, as paper books already have a zero rate of VAT, extending it to e-books is a necessary tidying up of the system to avoid any legal challenges. That is not 100 miles away from the situation with defibrillators, where some charities benefit from zero-rate VAT but others do not. Surely, whatever the purpose of the charity, the purpose of using a defibrillator is the same.

Another option is to widen the scope of organisations that can purchase a defibrillator without paying VAT. Instead of just covering charities with care, medical, rescue or first-aid missions, could not all charities, not-for-profits and community groups be allowed to purchase a defibrillator without paying VAT? After all, businesses can currently claim back VAT on defibrillators as part of their VAT return forms. Such an approach would direct savings to the people who need them most, while not setting a precedent for the blanket removal of VAT on a specific item. It also simplifies what is currently a confusing landscape in which people are not sure whether they are eligible for this VAT exemption.

Or perhaps we can set up a fund for charities and community groups, either to claim back their VAT or to aid them in buying defibrillators. Maybe a pot of money could be announced in the Budget—I am getting my bid in early. I am sure the creative and clever minds at the Treasury can come up with all sorts of options, and I place on record my huge thanks to the Minister, who I know has asked her team to do just that.

Whatever model we go for, the end we need to achieve is making community defibrillators more affordable, especially at a time when people's finances are increasingly stretched. Whatever route we choose, we need to publicise it and use the opportunity to address the lack of knowledge and confidence in defibrillator use. I identify with this, as I did not know how to use one until Trent District Community First Responders and Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service kindly offered to train me and my team. In fact they are training all sorts of groups across Rushcliffe, and it would be great if we could offer defibrillator and CPR training to Members and staff here in Parliament. When I asked, I was told there was no course I could do.

Parliament provides many other courses. We have media training, diversity and inclusion training and courses on how to use the Library, and I am told I can be tutored in any foreign language that might be useful for my work. All these are important, but none would teach me how to resuscitate a constituent at my surgery whose life is hanging in the balance.

Any of the proposed options I have discussed would be most effective alongside a big push to increase defibrillator training and a publicity campaign to raise awareness. Many people want to learn how to use a defibrillator and save a life, and many more can already use one and want to share this knowledge with others, so why do we not help to bring them together?

I have one final thought on how to maximise the impact of such a campaign. At present, it is a legal requirement to have firefighting equipment in places of work, residences and public buildings—everywhere really. What people need to have depends on the type of premises, but fire alarms, extinguishers and exit signs are all pretty universal. However, there is no legal requirement to have a defibrillator kept at a place of work. Why not? Some 80% of people believe that defibrillators should be mandated in workplaces, but only 30% of people have a defibrillator in their workplace.

Increasing access to defibrillators is not just the right thing to do; it also makes financial sense. Patients who have had early defibrillation have a significantly reduced stay in hospital and are far less likely to need treatment in intensive care. The average hospital stay is significantly less for survivors when a defibrillator is applied within

[Ruth Edwards]

the three-to-five-minute window and they spend less, if any, time in intensive care. Figures may differ from hospital to hospital, but on average an intensive care unit bed is about £2,300 more expensive per night.

In addition, patients who have a defibrillator used on them quickly have fewer ongoing health problems due to lack of blood and oxygen circulation to vital organs such as the brain. This means they require far less ongoing treatment. In short, we estimate that reducing the cost of defibrillators and increasing the number available for people to use in the community will save the NHS tens of millions of pounds, which is much needed to reinvest as it deals with the elective backlogs brought on by the pandemic.

In conclusion, I first raised this issue in Parliament at Prime Minister's questions back in March, and I would like to thank both the Minister and the Prime Minister for the priority they have given to this issue since. They both met my constituents Peter Stanbury and Paul Wilson, who are respectively the chairman and the coach of West Bridgford Colts, and I know the Treasury has been working on a number of options to take this forward. I would also like to thank Peter and Paul for coming to see me in my surgery and making me aware of this issue, and for the incredible work the Colts have done to raise money to buy more defibrillators for their training ground.

I would also like to thank Dylan's family—his mum Anna, his dad Mike and his sister Lucy—for allowing us to tell Dylan's story and for backing the Colts' campaign at what must be the darkest time of their lives. Sudden cardiac arrest can tear through the life of any family with devastating results. I am delighted by the energy and commitment the Government have shown to working on this issue, and I hope we can now agree on the best way forward and give it the green light, so that we can get on with delivering these life-saving changes.

I would just like to leave the House with a message from Dylan's mum Anna, who wrote to me this morning to say:

"I think it helps to emphasise the importance of community defibrillators, in the sense that we did get an output back on Dylan. Sadly, it was ultimately the time he was without adequately oxygenated blood to his brain that led to his death. Without the defibrillator, I don't think we would have left the football pitch."

**Jill Mortimer** (Hartlepool) (Con) *rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I was not aware that the hon. Lady wished to take part in the debate, but we do have a little time. Has the hon. Lady asked the permission of the Minister and the proposer of the debate?

**Jill Mortimer:** Yes, I have.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** And have they agreed?

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Lucy Frazer)** *indicated assent.*

**Ruth Edwards** *indicated assent.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Then the hon. Lady may make a short speech.

5.38 pm

**Jill Mortimer** (Hartlepool) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and forgive me. I still have my training wheels on, and there is definitely more I have to learn. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) and congratulate her on securing this important debate.

Five days ago, on 17 June, my constituents Pam and Bill Shurmer marked the first anniversary of the loss of their son Daniel to cardiac arrest. Daniel was only 43 years old, a keen sportsman and soon to be married. Pam and Bill decided to make something positive come from their tragic loss, and set up DS43 in Daniel's name. They set about ensuring that no one in Hartlepool will ever be more than 500 metres away from one of these lifesaving defibrillators. In just a year, they have been amazing. They have raised in the region of £60,000 and have installed 27 defibrillators. The 28th is going in next week, and they have plans to install a further 10.

Abolishing VAT on these life-saving machines would cost a negligible amount for the Treasury, but would make a huge difference, inducing people to purchase them and put them in places of work, communal spaces and local businesses, making them more accessible for all throughout our communities. Pam and Bill are right: no one should ever be more than 500 metres away from a life-saving defibrillator.

Pam, Bill and Daniel were already well known throughout Hartlepool, but through their campaign and fundraising, Pam and Bill have become true pillars of our Hartlepool community. I am proud to know them. They are truly special and an inspirational couple. I wish I could have met their wonderful son. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to them in this place for all the work that they have done in Daniel's memory. I have spoken to the Minister and I know that she understands how vital these life-saving machines are. I urge her to consider all options to make them more widely available for everyone in our communities.

5.40 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Lucy Frazer):** It is a privilege to respond to this Adjournment debate on behalf of the Government. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) on securing this evening's debate. As we have heard, this follows last year's tragic death of her constituent, Dylan Rich, at the age of just 17. It is also terrible to hear of the tragic death of Danny, the son of Bill and Pam Shurmer.

I commend my hon. Friends for the energy with which they are campaigning for a change in policy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe mentioned, she and I met the Prime Minister and the representatives from the West Bridgford Colts Football Club in March to discuss this issue. What she has said has touched all of us, and I wish to express again my condolences to Dylan's family, who themselves have campaigned extremely hard on this issue, as well as to Pam and to Bill.

I have heard my hon. Friend's argument and those of others here this evening. In answering the debate, I will briefly outline the Government's thinking and approach. Let me begin by saying that we appreciate the importance of this issue. Automated external defibrillators—or AEDs—save lives. Understanding that, we have sought

to boost their provision in many different ways. The Government encourage organisations across England to consider purchasing a defibrillator as part of their first aid equipment.

Many community defibrillators have been provided in public locations, including in shopping centres, through national lottery funding, community fundraising schemes, workplace funding or charities. The Government have also previously provided significant direct funding for the purchase of AEDs. In the 2015 Budget, the Government announced a £1 million grant to support the purchase of public access AEDs. This was followed up by a further £1 million at the 2016 Budget. These schemes were operated by the British Heart Foundation. After the first round of funding in 2015, the foundation announced that more than 700 additional AEDs had been installed across the UK.

In addition, from May 2020, the Government have required all contractors refurbishing schools, or building new ones, through centrally delivered programmes to provide at least one AED. As things stand, there are already more than 43,000 registered AEDs in England.

The Government have also worked with the British Heart Foundation to develop “the circuit”, a national defibrillator network, which records information on unregistered AEDs, such as those in shops and restaurants. The circuit is now live in 13 of the 14 ambulance services across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This information is available in a centralised network for easy access in emergencies, meaning that ambulance services can find AEDs when they are most needed. The system also sends out reminders to make sure that AEDs are maintained and emergency-ready.

Meanwhile, the NHS Long Term Plan, published in January 2019, includes a section on cardiovascular disease and AEDs. The NHS has committed to developing a national network of first responders and access to AEDs, which will save roughly 4,000 lives a year by 2028.

Tax relief also has a part to play. VAT is not charged on AEDs donated, for example, to the NHS, rescue and first aid charities, and charities caring for disabled people.

Local authorities and taxable businesses can also recover VAT on AEDs. The point of all of this is to say that there are existing reliefs, as well as historical funding and other initiatives, which are significantly improving access to AEDs up and down the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe made a point about extending VAT relief. As she said, we have examined the specific merits of zero-rating AEDs. We are conscious that pass-through of a VAT relief on AEDs to consumer prices is likely to be low. Evidence on pass-through of VAT reliefs generally suggests that where markets are concentrated—as they are for AEDs—pass-through tends to be significantly less than 50%. In other words, a new zero rate would not necessarily lead to a reduction in prices. Instead, businesses might choose to absorb the tax relief as profit. If we are to take this step, we need to be sure that zero-rating AEDs would represent genuine value for money and make a real difference in expanding public access to AEDs.

As my hon. Friend recognised, we also have a wider responsibility, at a time of economic challenge, to minimise pressure on the public finances. However, I am grateful to her for all the work she has done, and continues to do, to bring this issue to public attention. I also recognise the campaigning work done by Pam and Bill, who are grieving the sad loss of their son, Danny. Therefore, notwithstanding the point I have made about VAT, I want to be clear to Members here today that, as we remember Dylan and Danny, we will continue to look at what more the Government can do to expand access to AEDs. The Prime Minister has therefore asked the Department of Health and Social Care to examine whether there are ways to further expand public access to defibrillators, and I have spoken to the Minister responsible—the Minister for patient safety—about this very issue. Like my hon. Friends the Members for Rushcliffe and for Hartlepool (Jill Mortimer), we know that AEDs save lives.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.47 pm

*House adjourned.*



## Deferred Division

### HEALTH AND PERSONAL SOCIAL SERVICES

That the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 554), a copy of which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

*The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 70.*

### Division No. 18]

#### AYES

Abrahams, Debbie  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Anderson, Fleur  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, rh Jonathan  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Badenoch, Kemi  
Barker, Paula  
Baron, Mr John  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Bell, Aaron  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Blake, Olivia  
Blomfield, Paul  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bowie, Andrew  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brereton, Jack  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Buchan, Felicity  
Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
Burgon, Richard  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Carter, Andy  
Chalk, Alex  
Champion, Sarah  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, Feryal  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Coutinho, Claire  
Creasy, Stella  
Crouch, Tracey  
Cryer, John  
Daby, Janet  
Daly, James  
David, Wayne  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Doughty, Stephen  
Duddridge, James  
Dunne, rh Philip  
Eagle, Maria  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Edwards, Ruth  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
Elmore, Chris  
Esterson, Bill  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Everitt, Ben  
Farry, Stephen  
Firth, Anna  
Fletcher, Mark  
Foy, Mary Kelly  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
French, Mr Louie  
Garnier, Mark  
Gibson, Peter  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Glen, John  
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Richard  
Green, Kate  
Green, Sarah  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Dame Nia  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hanna, Claire  
Hardy, Emma  
Harris, Carolyn  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hart, rh Simon  
Hayes, Helen  
Healey, rh John  
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Hendrick, Sir Mark  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Holmes, Paul  
Howarth, rh Sir George  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Johnston, David  
Jones, Gerald  
Keegan, Gillian  
Keeley, Barbara  
Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Pat McFadden*)  
Khan, Afzal  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Kyle, Peter  
Lake, Ben  
Largan, Robert  
Leadbeater, Kim  
Long Bailey, Rebecca

Lopez, Julia  
Loughton, Tim  
Lucas, Caroline  
Mackrory, Cherilyn  
Madders, Justin  
Mak, Alan  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McCartney, Jason  
McDonnell, rh John  
McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McMahon, Jim  
McMorrin, Anna  
Mearns, Ian  
Merriman, Huw  
Miller, rh Dame Maria  
Mills, Nigel  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moran, Layla  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Morris, James  
Morrisey, Joy  
Mortimer, Jill  
Nichols, Charlotte  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, rh Jesse  
Norris, Alex  
Oppong-Asare, Abena  
Osborne, Kate  
Owen, Sarah  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Perkins, Mr Toby  
Phillipson, Bridget  
Pollard, Luke  
Poulter, Dr Dan  
Pritchard, rh Mark  
Quince, Will  
Rayner, rh Angela  
Rees, Christina  
Reeves, Ellie  
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
Richards, Nicola  
Richardson, Angela  
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Saxby, Selaine  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
Simmonds, David  
Skidmore, rh Chris  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Nick  
Smyth, Karin  
Sobel, Alex  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stevens, Jo  
Stride, rh Mel  
Stringer, Grahame  
Sturdy, Julian  
Sultana, Zarah  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tarry, Sam  
Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
Tolhurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Trott, Laura  
Twist, Liz  
Vaz, rh Valerie  
Wakeford, Christian  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Warman, Matt  
Watling, Giles  
West, Catherine  
Whately, Helen  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whittome, Nadia  
Wiggin, Sir Bill  
Wild, James  
Williams, Craig  
Williams, Hywel  
Wilson, Munira  
Winter, Beth  
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

#### NOES

Anderson, Lee  
Ansell, Caroline  
Bailey, Shaun  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Benton, Scott  
Berry, rh Jake  
Blackman, Bob  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Bristow, Paul  
Bruce, Fiona  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Cash, Sir William  
Caulfield, Maria  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Davies, Philip  
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
Donelan, rh Michelle  
Drax, Richard  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Fletcher, Nick  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Fuller, Richard  
Girvan, Paul  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Grundy, James  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Hughes, Eddie  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Kawczynski, Daniel

Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Kruger, Danny  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lockhart, Carla  
Longhi, Marco  
Maskell, Rachael  
Maynard, Paul  
Millar, Robin  
Offord, Dr Matthew

Paisley, Ian  
Randall, Tom  
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Robinson, Gavin  
Rowley, Lee  
Sambrook, Gary  
Shannon, Jim  
Smith, Greg

Stafford, Alexander  
Stewart, Iain  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Syms, Sir Robert  
Tomlinson, Michael  
Vickers, Martin

Vickers, Matt  
Whittaker, Craig  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wood, Mike  
Young, Jacob

*Question accordingly agreed to.*





## Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 22 June 2022*

[**PHILIP DAVIES** *in the Chair*]

### Homes for Ukraine: Child Refugees

9.30 am

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** The eagle-eyed among you will have noticed that because of what I as a Yorkshireman consider to be the oppressive heat, I have removed the requirement to wear a jacket for this debate. I call Tulip Siddiq to move the motion.

**Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Homes for Ukraine scheme and child refugees.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies.

I want us to consider the merits of reforming the Homes for Ukraine scheme to provide better support to children fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Many Members know that this issue is close to my heart. My mother came to the UK in the 1970s as a political asylum seeker. She came to this country because 19 members of her family had been killed in Bangladesh and it was too dangerous for her to go home. She did not want to leave her home, and every time I speak to her she talks about how she had no choice but to come to this country; the threat of violence meant that she could not stay in Bangladesh. I could not help but see the parallels when I heard the case raised by my inspirational constituent, Mark Falcon, about two sisters: 13-year-old Mariia and 18-year-old Nataliia, who fled their war-torn hometown in Ukraine with the hope of coming to the UK.

The UK has a long and proud history of providing safe refuge to children fleeing danger and conflict. Indeed, my mother was a similar age to Nataliia when the UK welcomed her to our shores. My mother settled in Kilburn, the area that I now represent in Westminster. My constituent, Mark, acting in the best traditions of our country—indeed, of our constituency—is representative of Hampstead and Kilburn because he offered to take Mariia and her sister Nataliia into his house through the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Mariia's and Nataliia's parents had taken the brave decision to remain in Ukraine and serve their country in its struggle against Russia's bloody and unjust invasion. One of the parents is in the military; the other is a doctor. The sisters applied for visas on the basis that my constituent, Mark, would be able to house them on arrival. The family's hopes that both children would be able to safely enter the UK were brutally shattered when Nataliia was granted permission to travel, but Mariia, because she is under 18, was not. The Home Office told me that she could not come here without her parents, even though she had already left Ukraine and was travelling through Montenegro with her 18-year-old sister. So she was not allowed to come here because she did not have her parents with her, even though she had her 18-year-old sister accompanying her.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab):** I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and for making such an important speech on what is happening at the moment. My office is dealing with similar cases and there is very little we can say to sponsors who are desperate to bring people over. I am glad to see that the guidance on unaccompanied minors has been updated, but does my hon. Friend agree with me that it might have already left some young people at the mercy of people traffickers? We have had various other situations as well. If it had happened once or twice, we might have thought it was an error, but when a family attempts to bring their entire family and the Home Office leaves off the visa for the youngest person in the family, that obviously means that the family will not travel. I started to believe that there was something sinister at play here. Does my hon. Friend agree that the situation is absolutely disgraceful and the Home Office needs to take care when it issues visas for families? It needs something in place to attempt to find the many young people who might have already moved into Europe and might be at the mercy of people traffickers.

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** Order. Interventions need to be briefer.

**Tulip Siddiq:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I have heard such stories many times from lots of my colleagues, so there is a fundamental flaw in the Home Office process. I have not seen the policy officially announced yet, although I might have missed it during my rather traumatic journey to Parliament today, but I am sure the Minister will update me. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to that topic later in my speech when I talk about one person in the family being left behind whereas the rest of the family can come, which is not acceptable.

**Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Does she agree with me about the case of Alikia Zubets, a four-year-old girl from Kharkiv who has been stuck in Poland with her grandmother? She has a sponsor, Dr Maggie Babb, in my constituency in Newcastle-under-Lyme, and extended family in Staffordshire, yet we have been waiting for the policy decision for weeks. I hope to hear something very shortly from the Minister. The little girl has to return to Kharkiv because her right to stay in Poland runs out on the 25th. Does the hon. Lady agree that such cases demonstrate the need for an urgent resolution of the issue?

**Tulip Siddiq:** This is not often said in this place, but I absolutely agree with my colleague from the other side of the House. I have a daughter who is not far off the age of the little girl the hon. Gentleman describes, so it is heartbreaking to think of her being separated from her family and not being given safe accommodation when something changing in the Home Office could rectify the problem. However, I know that the Minister cares and I hope to hear him announce the updated policy.

As many people will know, and before we hear the updated policy, the rules of the Homes for Ukraine scheme dictate that unaccompanied children are allowed to apply only if they are travelling with their parents or legal guardians to the UK. I understand that the Government have to take into account safeguarding

[*Tulip Siddiq*]

risks such as people trafficking, and that the Government of Ukraine have stated a preference for keeping unaccompanied children in regions close to Ukraine, but this blanket, blunt policy and the failure to take a more sophisticated case-by-case approach has completely ignored situations such as Mariia's.

The Home Office should be consulting the sector more and making the system work for such children. Excellent organisations such as the Refugee Council and the Children's Society, to name just two, do this work day in, day out. They could help to come up with solutions that would provide children with necessary protections and safeguards. That is all we in the House want; we want to protect the children and make them safe; we do not want them to go through unnecessary trauma and be unable to come to our country. Perhaps then, Mariia—a 13-year-old girl—would not be forced to choose between returning to a war zone and staying alone, putting herself at risk in temporary hotel accommodation in Montenegro. That situation is especially ridiculous to me because she has a warm, safe home waiting for her in my constituency, but she cannot get here because of Government bureaucracy.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and commend her powerful speech. She is right to put safeguarding at the centre of all our policies in this area. Does she agree that the Home Office changing its policy in April was inexplicable, as is why it has been unable to come up with a robust framework to provide for the safeguarding of unaccompanied children? By not doing so, the Home Office has put those children at more risk.

**Tulip Siddiq**: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and he is absolutely right. It is a pity that so many children have been affected by the inability to rectify the policy. We knew the war was coming. I know we had to develop the policy at short notice, but I wish the Home Office had taken the issue more seriously and come up with solutions, as my hon. Friend has described. I will speak more about that later in my speech.

The interventions from colleagues across the House have shown that Mariia's story is not an isolated case. I have dealt with countless similar cases of unaccompanied children denied access to the homes for Ukraine scheme due to the rigid and bureaucratic approach of the Home Office. For example, David and his wife in my constituency sponsored sisters aged 20 and 13 to live with them in London, but because of the Government's policy the sisters never made it to the UK. Diahann, also my constituent, sponsored two 17-year-olds, who ended up sleeping on a kitchen floor in a small flat in Poland rather than in Diahann's home.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February has resulted in more than 7 million refugees fleeing that country, but by 14 June, only 82,000 UK visas had been issued under Homes for Ukraine, and only about 50,000 of those people had arrived in the UK. That is less than two thirds of those who had been issued with a visa, but the Home Office has failed to explain why so many with visas have yet to arrive in the UK. That was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy).

The Refugee Council has warned that the gap between those figures might be explained in part by cases in which only some in a family unit have been issued with a visa. It is heartbreaking to think that all the older brothers and sisters have chosen to stay in Ukraine with their younger siblings rather than make the journey without them. That is not something that any of us would want for our family, and I hope everyone will agree that it is not something that people in Ukraine should have to suffer through.

**Aaron Bell**: May I take this opportunity to praise Lord Harrington for his engagement on this issue? There has clearly been, first, diplomatic wrangling with the Ukrainians and, secondly, policy decisions being made in both Whitehall and the devolved Administrations. I realise that the delay has been far too long, but may I take the opportunity to praise the Minister for Refugees for his engagement on the issue, because he has spoken to me personally about the case that I raised with the hon. Lady earlier?

**Tulip Siddiq**: Again, I find myself agreeing with the hon. Gentleman. The Minister for Refugees, to his credit, also met me about the case that I raised at Prime Minister's questions and was fully briefed on the case, which impressed me, so I thank him. But again, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the delay was unacceptable, and I hope that it will very soon be rectified officially.

I am cautiously optimistic after hearing reports this week that the Home Office is considering changing the visa rules to allow unaccompanied Ukrainian children and teenagers to come to the UK. That would end an unjust policy that has seen siblings separated and children abandoned in the most dangerous of situations. I would like the Minister here today to confirm whether those reports are true and tell us officially if the policy has changed, and explain why it took so long, despite so much suffering, for the Government to acknowledge that it is unacceptable to bar unaccompanied children from refuge in our country.

*The Times* has reported that the Home Office estimates that at least 500 children have been stuck in limbo in Ukraine for two months or more because of the unaccompanied child policy. I hope that this Minister, who I know cares, will be able to tell us today how many children his Department estimates have been prevented from accessing the Homes for Ukraine scheme because of this particular policy, and how those children's applications for asylum would be considered under any new rules that the Government are considering.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very important speech. Does she agree that if, as we hope, provisions are to be put in place to welcome unaccompanied children to this country, it would be useful to hear from the Minister what special support will be put in place for those incredibly traumatised children and the families acting as their hosts?

**Tulip Siddiq**: That is something that I will talk about. It is all very well to welcome people to this country, but we need to think about the lives that they go on to lead. I will refer to that shortly and I thank my hon. Friend for the intervention.

Putting aside for one moment the unaccompanied child policy, I think it is important also to highlight the broader failings in the Homes for Ukraine scheme for child refugees. I believe that, even under the existing rules on unaccompanied children, my constituent, Mark, and his wife should have been able to welcome Mariia into their home. After the Home Office had refused to approve her application, Mariia's parents provided a notarised statement, in Ukrainian and English, giving their consent for Mariia's 18-year-old sister, Nataliia, to act on behalf of her younger sibling, but that note was deemed insufficient by the Home Office. Mariia's parents still did not give up, because they were so desperate to send their two daughters to safety in the UK. Eventually they were able to obtain from the local authority a legal guardianship document that confirmed that Nataliia could act as the legal guardian for Mariia, but that still did not bring Mariia to the UK. As a result, and despite repeated representations to the Home Office by my office and my caseworker, Julia, and my constituent, the two sisters were stuck in a dangerous temporary hostel in Montenegro for weeks.

Only after I raised this topic at Prime Minister's questions a couple of weeks ago was the Home Office finally forced to review the case, but not every MP will be as lucky as me and get in at Prime Minister's questions at a very timely moment to raise a case. That is something that the House needs to consider. I got a call from the Home Office and the Minister because I raised the case with the Prime Minister, but there are so many cases with Members across the House that need special attention. I am of course grateful to the Home Secretary for her assistance, but there are potentially more Mariias out there, trapped in war-torn Ukraine or countries where they have no family or network of support. I ask this Minister to look into that. I am concerned that even under the existing rules, these cases are not being dealt with properly or urgently, so I want reassurance from the Minister. What are the Government doing to take the necessary steps to address these failings in the refugee system generally?

Sadly, even now, Mariia has not been able to enter the UK, but I hope that that will not be the case for too much longer. It is important to recognise that when Mariia and other children like her do come to the UK, they will need more than just a safe home when they enter these shores. These children, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) mentioned, have experienced serious trauma. They require specialist support to ensure that they successfully integrate into their new community. People arriving under Homes for Ukraine receive a visa for three years, but currently the integration funding is available only for the first year. I hope that the Minister can confirm today whether further funding will be provided to local authorities so that they can support people for the full three years.

**Kate Green:** May I ask my hon. Friend to note the position of pregnant women and new mums and their babies, and the support for them, not just through local authorities but through the health service? Does she agree that that will need to be sustained, particularly for women who will be without a partner at that time, increasing their sense of isolation and trauma?

**Tulip Siddiq:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the plight of vulnerable women and children. The Refugee Council has warned of a growing number of people

arriving under the Ukraine schemes ending up homeless, potentially including young children and pregnant women. Government data show that 480 Ukrainian families and 180 single adults have had to apply to a local authority for support with homelessness. I am particularly concerned that 145 placements under Homes for Ukraine have already ended in homelessness: 90 because the relationship broke down and 55 that never started, because the accommodation was deemed unsuitable before the refugees moved in.

I understand the Government have now established a mechanism through which those who have to leave a placement can be rematched with another Homes for Ukraine host. So far, that has proved unsuccessful: only 20 placements have been rematched. Will the Minister explain the steps his Department is taking to ensure that people arriving under the Ukraine Family scheme are able to access accommodation provided under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, should they find themselves homeless after arrival in the UK?

I will finish by saying that I am proud of my constituents. Hampstead and Kilburn is a constituency with a long history of welcoming people from all over the world, including migrants from Ireland and Jewish people fleeing Nazi Germany. The Government should work with my constituents, not against them, in their efforts to help child refugees from Ukraine. That is why I hope the Minister will give my constituent, Mark, and others like him across the UK the respect they deserve, by setting out how the Government will address the serious failings in the Homes for Ukraine scheme and wider child refugee system.

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** Just to let colleagues know, I want to get to the Front Benchers by 10.30 am at the latest. There seem to be five people catching my eye, so you can do your own mathematics. I remind colleagues not to eat into other people's time. I call Crispin Blunt.

9.48 am

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on securing the debate. Our caseworkers will be immensely grateful to her for bringing attention to the issue, because they have spent an enormous amount of time pursuing cases on our behalf.

Obviously, it is a huge pleasure to have the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) present to represent the Government. I am slightly confused, however, as to why it is not a Home Office Minister who will be responding to the debate. It does not send out the right message to have the Minister for rough sleeping addressing the issue of Ukrainian children coming to the United Kingdom. This is a policy issue and there should be a policy Minister here to make a statement about the change that the Government are making, which is hugely welcome.

I want to raise one of two cases that my staff have spent an inordinate amount of time addressing, to illustrate the issue that I suspect many colleagues will speak to. I will call this 15-year-old girl Oksana, because her identity needs a certain amount of protection. She is trying to get to the United Kingdom, accompanied



[Crispin Blunt]

by her grandparents and cousin, but she does not have permission to do so under the rules. She is sitting in Germany, about to be evicted from the property there.

The family have been trying to assemble the paperwork required by the Home Office to bring Oksana here. The problem is that her father is fighting for the Ukrainian armed forces and is engaged in combat, and her mother has found herself in Russian-occupied Ukraine, where it is extremely difficult to get to her. Even so, the family have managed to get notarised documents from the mother in Russian-occupied Ukraine in order to produce the documentation to say that her cousin could be her temporary legal guardian. The family have gone to the trouble of getting that documentation out of occupied Ukraine—and the Home Office has now had the data for a month—but they are still in housing in Germany and are about to be evicted.

This whole chain of events and all those requirements are simply unacceptable, not least when one considers that the whole Border Force system appears to be prioritising Ukrainian matters, which has had an enormous knock-on effect on all the other immigration cases with which teams are having to assist. Even people who have paid for premium-priced visas in order to come to the United Kingdom are not getting the attention that they have paid for at a substantial rate.

That is why I particularly regret that there is not a Home Office Minister here to respond to the debate—because, to be frank, most of these issues are not the responsibility of the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North, who has been put forward by the Government. I understand the pressures that result in the Government sometimes sending Ministers to respond to Westminster Hall debates on subjects for which they do not have particular policy responsibility. However, given that the Government appear to be about to make a policy statement on this issue, I really think that a Minister from the right Department should be responding to this debate.

In Oksana's case, with her mother now in Russian-occupied Ukraine and her father fighting on the frontline with the Ukrainian armed forces, the requirements that the Government have insisted on to date are utterly extraordinary. If those requirements are about to be reviewed, I am glad. But it does not give one much confidence that, even when people have gone through the enormous steps of finding the means to satisfy the Government's requirements, they have been left waiting for a month for the decision whether to allow them to come to the United Kingdom. That is not good enough.

9.52 am

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Davies. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for securing this timely debate on this important issue.

None of us in this House could have failed to be horrified by the destruction caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The ruins in Mariupol and Kharkiv that we see on our television screens, on Twitter and on social media were not just buildings. They were schools,

hospitals, supermarkets and churches, like the places we all visit and can still visit. They were homes that people grew up in. They were vibrant communities of friends and families.

We must treat those who have been forced out of their homes with the respect they deserve. That means making it as easy as possible for refugees to build a new community in this country, and giving people the long-term security and certainty they need to live comfortably. While it is right that we do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good when dealing with such a fast-paced crisis, the Government must and can do more to ensure that refugees get the support they deserve.

One of my constituents, who offered her three-bedroom home to two women from Ukraine, had to wait 12 weeks to be told this Monday that she did not meet the requirements to be a sponsor, despite my local council checking her property and my constituent having an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check via her work in the NHS. It is unacceptable that hosts and refugees are having to wait 12 weeks for a decision.

This is not an isolated case in my inbox, and nor will it be an isolated case raised in the debate today or in debates in the main Chamber. Asylum decisions have halved in the past five years and the Passport Office is in disarray, so it is disappointing to have the Minister from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), here to respond, even though I have the utmost respect for him and know that he cares passionately about the issue. However, it is the Home Office that needs to get a grip on this issue.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn mentioned, more than 500 Ukrainian children are currently waiting to find out from the Home Office if they can travel safely to the UK. The charity Safe Passage has highlighted the case of a 17 year old girl, Valya, who has been helped by the hon. Lord Dubs. She has been travelling alone across different war zones for the past two months, unable to get to the UK and also unable to go back home, because her family are now in hiding, fearful for their lives. That should not be happening. The Minister needs to inform us today of what measures he is going to recommend to his colleagues in the Home Office to speed up the decision-making process for people who are so desperate for certainty.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme is not a permanent solution for refugees in this country. Ukrainian families need a home of their own, and we must plan for what happens following that six-month period. Those six months are going to come to a sharp end for many people, and I pay tribute to my constituents in Vauxhall and constituents right across the country who have opened up their homes and are ready and willing to help, but they have been failed.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that at least 17 unaccompanied children go missing in Europe every day, falling into the hands of victimisers who traffic them, exploit them—including sexual exploitation—and use those young children. That cannot continue to happen. We need the Government to step up and match the generosity of people across the UK who are willing to help. The Government need to sort out this mess and create a safe route for young children to come to this country.

9.56 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): As always, Mr Davies, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I apologise, but I have to leave early to chair another meeting; I have already spoken to the Minister, the shadow Minister—the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen)—and the sponsor of the debate, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq).

This is a very important debate on an issue that has proven to be very close to everyone's heart. Those who have already spoken have expressed as much, and they have also spoken of their support for those from Ukraine who are in need. Those who will speak after me will reiterate that, too.

Russia's attacks on Ukraine have been condemned by all of the free world, and by many who feel greatly anguished at the stories they witness—the destruction of property, the changing of lives, and the bestial and indiscriminate attacks carried out on families, including women and children. It is those people trying to flee who we wish to help. The Minister has a compassionate heart and he understands these issues. We spoke beforehand and I am sure that we will be encouraged by his response. Having also been in contact with him previously, I am pleased by what I have heard, including on what will happen afterwards.

I commend the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn on securing this debate. She has a really big heart—she might be small in stature, but she is big in heart—and she brings forward things that we all support. I commend her on her stance and for giving us all the opportunity to participate in this debate, and wish her well in all she does. I was very disheartened to hear of her constituent, Mark Falcon, who, for the reasons she has outlined, has been denied the opportunity to take in two Ukrainian refugees through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. We must do more to ensure that protections are in place for child refugees; they should simply not be turned away. There was some good news in the papers this morning, which I read before I came to the Chamber: a 17-year-old has been able to get her access and come across, even though she has waited for some time in limbo—in that grey area—for that to happen.

My constituency of Strangford has taken in a number of Ukrainian refugees, and I thank Donald and Jacqueline Fleming from the Faith in Action group, who have enabled other refugees, including young people, to find homes in Northern Ireland. Five or six weeks ago, I had the opportunity to go to Poland, along with other MPs, to see that country's contribution to the refugee crisis. It was a very poignant moment, because I had the opportunity to see, at the coalface, the refugees coming through to Poland. At one of the centres we visited, there were 2,800 refugees, including lots of young families. The desperation—the look on their faces—told us that these were groups of people under great pressure.

I put on record that our Government have helped. There has been a bit of a hold-up in the process and some things to address, but I am encouraged by the news this morning regarding 1,000 unaccompanied minors who had previously been left in limbo because the Homes for Ukraine scheme required young people to travel. I understand that the Government are changing that. I am sure that the Minister will confirm that; I think that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn

herself referred to it earlier. If that change is coming, which I think it is, then this debate has enabled it to happen and again we thank the hon. Lady for that.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): My team and I spent months advocating on behalf of a 15-year-old girl who was travelling with her aunt before I managed to get the Minister for Refugees to make an intervention to grant her a visa by exception. I will welcome whatever announcement comes from the Government today, but does the hon. Member agree that it could have been made a bit earlier, to reduce the distress for other children who are stuck in Ukraine and other countries and are trying to get to safety here?

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. She is absolutely right and confirms the very issue that we are discussing. There has been much distress for those families who are in the pipeline of coming through, and the quicker the announcement is made and the quicker the legislative change comes, the quicker that we can do away with all those issues.

I am a strong advocate for offering support—both financial and humanitarian—in times of need. It is one of my jobs here and it is also one of my portfolios. I take sincere pride in my constituency of Strangford. We have a history of taking in those who need refuge. Ballyrolly House on the Woburn Road in Millisle in Strangford operated as a refugee resettlement farm from 1938 to 1948 for the Kindertransport children. Lord Dubs has already been referred to. We have a really physical part of history in that house, and some of those people who came from 1938 to 1948 stayed there. Indeed, some of their descendants still live locally.

The story of the farm in Millisle remains a little-known tale outside of its locality. In the 1930s, Jewish children escaping persecution in Europe came to live on the remote farm in the Ards peninsula. Children on the farm would play football with the locals or go swimming at Millisle beach. Occasionally, they would even hire a rowing boat and spend the evenings fishing for herrings, which were in plentiful supply along the edge of the Irish sea and in Strangford lough as well.

Those are some of the things that my ancestors and others did to help the Kindertransport children, to help the Jewish children, back in the period from 1938 to 1948. Today, our country—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—is doing its best to do the same thing again for other children.

I believe that we all have a responsibility to ensure that all refugees are protected. There must be more of an onus on us to help children, as they are much more vulnerable than adults. Again, our hearts go out to the small children. Whatever the reason—perhaps it is because we are adults or because we have a compassionate nature and a big heart—we do reach out to the children. Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom have given refuge before in times of need.

It is disheartening to see young children being sent back to Ukraine for reasons that should have been checked by the Home Office prior to their arrival. If we are correcting that issue, it is good news, but it does not do away with the distress that the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) referred to. That distress is still very real, but let us lessen it.

[*Jim Shannon*]

We must ensure that there is due diligence in searching and assessing the homes used in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, so that people are guaranteed a safe environment for the six months that they are there. I know the reasons why the safety checks are done. We all agree on that, because it is the right thing to do.

We also must ensure that those who have applied to take in refugees are vetted and undergo police checks so as to ensure refugee safety. If homes are assessed and people vetted, I see no reason why Mark Falcon, who was referred to earlier, could not have taken in the two refugees, despite one being under 18. I understand that there may have been concerns in regard to her age, but she was with her elder sister, which should probably have given a wee bit more protection. Perhaps the Home Office should have seen that right away. I for one agree that, without a doubt, she would have been better off here, despite those concerns.

We must treat those in war in the same way as we would expect to be treated back. I am a great believer, as is everyone in this House, in treating others as we would wish them to treat us. That is not a bad way of looking on life and doing things in the right way.

To conclude, the Homes for Ukraine scheme is a fantastic way to provide solace and refuge, of which 28,000 people have already availed. The work to provide safe environments must be done before refugees arrive. It is simply not fair to provide hope but to then send children away due to their age. Let us give them the protection they need, and let us make sure that the changes that have been mooted today come about. As long as we have followed the regulations and safety checks to as high a standard as possible, we should—indeed, we must—rethink the process that is preventing the most vulnerable children from receiving the protection they need in this country. We welcome them here, and we look forward to them being here and to giving them the hope for the future that they very much need.

10.4 am

**Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for securing the debate.

A few weeks ago, I was lucky enough to be invited to a coffee morning for Ukrainian refugees at St Mary's church in Chesham. The coffee mornings are held weekly and are organised by local volunteers who have dedicated their time to helping new arrivals settle in. Watching the Ukrainian children play with local children and hearing how they felt about starting school here in the UK was particularly moving. For many of them, getting here was not straightforward, and many more like them are stuck in Ukraine or neighbouring countries, with or without their parents, unable to make it to the homes waiting for them here due to overcomplicated and unnecessary bureaucracy.

To add to some of the examples, two siblings—a 22-year-old woman and her 17-year-old brother—were stuck in Warsaw for over seven weeks waiting for their visa applications to be approved. The 17-year-old boy's application was put on hold as he was marked as being an unaccompanied minor. We were instructed to obtain

an official parental letter of consent and passport scans. We were told the case was being escalated, and it seemed like progress was being made. Yet after weeks of back and forth with Home Office staff and multiple visits to the Portcullis House hub, we were told the documents were not legally binding and that the case should not be progressed any further until the policy decision was made by the Home Secretary. That was on 13 May. It has been reported that a policy decision has now been taken on unaccompanied minors, and I am sure that I am not the only Member keen to hear the detail of that decision, hopefully, today.

For the officials and Ministers responsible for the scheme, it must feel like driving at full speed while still trying to build the car, and I am sure that I am not the only person grateful for the many hours being put into trying to make the scheme work as best as possible. If I may give one additional piece of feedback, the problems are not just with unaccompanied minors. In the cases my team and I have been dealing with, there is a real pattern of errors and delays whenever children are involved. Where children have applied with their parents, there are often issues with linking the applications, and that is what I want to highlight this morning. In one case, the Home Office failed to link a mother's application with that of her two children for six weeks. While her application progressed, theirs were halted and marked as unaccompanied minors. When they were finally linked, additional sponsor checks had to be done given that the sponsors were now hosting two children, rather than a single adult female as they had thought. It took eight weeks for the family to arrive in the UK.

In another case, a mother travelled from Lviv to Warsaw with her two young children to collect their visas only to be told the children's visas were not yet ready. The failure to link families' cases is causing additional and unnecessary stress for people who are already terrified, traumatised and exhausted. There must be a better way of ensuring children are dealt with alongside their parents, so that they are not incorrectly marked as unaccompanied minors and unfairly delayed.

10.8 am

**Olivia Blake** (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on securing this important debate. It has been amazingly heartening to see so many people, including many of my constituents, open their hearts and homes to those fleeing this war. It has been equally amazing to see the passion of Members of Parliament, such as my hon. Friend, in fighting to get families reunited and brought here through the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Like my hon. Friend, I am concerned about what the future will hold for Ukrainian refugees, especially children, who have come here through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. We rightly celebrate kinship care for our own children, so it feels incredibly wrong that this is being denied to children whose parents have no choice but to leave them with other family members to come to the UK. Ministers must take responsibility for the limitations of the scheme.

The issues I want to raise relate mainly to our duty of care for refugees once they arrive. First, some will be unable to complete their six-month placement with



their host. In fact, reports suggest that as many as 660 Ukrainian households have had to declare themselves homeless to their council because of breakdowns in relationships with hosts. Some have been asked to leave with just a day's notice, making it incredibly difficult for them to seek alternative arrangements. For child refugees, it goes without saying that that is hugely destabilising. They are more vulnerable and they are being turned out of homes: 480 households with dependent children had no choice but to seek help because they had discovered the accommodation that they were supposed to be living in was not fit for purpose or meeting their needs. I have also been made aware of situations where the host's Disclosure and Barring Service check came back with concerns—and this was after children had been placed with them—meaning that families could no longer stay and their place of sanctuary suddenly became a place of fear.

Secondly, I have been wondering why the checks and balances and, importantly, the support offered to hosts are not the same as those for foster carers, especially therapeutic interventions. They should also be provided to the host family. Local authorities need the resources to adequately prioritise and ensure safeguarding and welfare. Access to education probably deserves a debate in its own right, as it is a huge issue for children. A catch-up for schools in the summer is a great idea that has been raised with me by the Ukrainian society in Sheffield.

The warmth and generosity from members of the public has been inspiring, but things can go wrong. Ministers cannot and should not forget refugees once they have entered the country. That leads me to the third problem: what will happen to people once their six-month placement is over? At the moment, Ukrainians are facing a cliff edge. Some organisations have highlighted that they might struggle to access housing. We know that some landlords will not accept those who receive benefits, until the law hopefully changes. Others will struggle to provide the years of financial evidence required for renting. Deposits and up-front rent will also be a challenge. The availability of social housing has clearly been a challenge for many years. In Sheffield, over 20,000 people are already on waiting lists.

For those people who have lost everything in war, housing will be critical when the six-month cut-out comes. Since people have already been here for up to three or four months, it is becoming critical. They have no one to act as guarantors, which is another issue for private renting. The Government must face up to the reality and urgently investigate how those who came here under the Homes for Ukraine scheme can be housed securely. They must put in place a plan for what happens after the initial housing period comes to an end.

If we do not get this right, Ministers will be stripping vulnerable people of the hope that they had been given for a better future in the UK by the Homes for Ukraine scheme. I ask them to urgently consider what resettlement options will be available to people at the end of the six months.

10.12 am

**Steven Bonnar** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn

(Tulip Siddiq) for securing and leading the debate, and all Members for their valuable and heartfelt contributions.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, more than 5 million people have fled the horrors of war, with a further 8 million internally displaced in their homeland. The majority of those seeking refuge are women and children. So far, the UK Government's response has fallen short of what is required. By the end of May, the UK had taken in 65,700 refugees from Ukraine. Germany, by contrast, had taken in 780,000 Ukrainians.

Across Europe, our neighbours have stepped up to meet the challenge, waiving requirements and placing refuge and sanctuary first and bureaucracy second. Our friends and closest neighbours in Ireland waived all those requirements immediately when it became clear that a humanitarian crisis was unfolding. Here, the Government kicked their heels. Shortly after the crisis began, the First Minister of Scotland called on the UK Government to match the approach of the Irish Government, saying:

"Let people in and do the paperwork afterwards,"

and that "common humanity demands it". She was right then and she is right now.

The UK Government should long have followed the EU's example by waiving visa requirements for any Ukrainian national seeking refuge in the United Kingdom, as well as mirroring the European Union's temporary protection directive. While we in the SNP fully appreciate the need to remain vigilant to all security threats, that should not prevent the Government from putting in place measures that balance those concerns with the desperate needs of the people of Ukraine, as our friends in Ireland and across the EU have done.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those across my constituency of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill for their heroic efforts in supporting families who have come to Scotland in the manner that they have—those who have opened their homes and hearts to the lovely kids and families through the Homes for Ukraine scheme—but the incredible response across Scotland and the rest of the UK must never be seen by the Government as a means of outsourcing the response and the responsibility. Ministers must engage with local authorities across the UK to ensure that full and sustained support, and funding, is made available.

I am sure everyone in the room is deeply troubled by reports that children are being forced to return to Ukraine after the Home Office refused to accept family members as their legal guardians. Whatever the issues with red tape and self-made bureaucracy—that is what it is—the answer can never be to send children back to a warzone, but that is what has been happening.

A four-year-old girl was considered to be an unaccompanied minor under Home Office regulations as she was travelling with her grandmother rather than with her parents. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn spoke of Mariia, a 13-year-old girl who was forced to return to Ukraine after having her application refused, despite travelling with her 18-year-old sister. The Home Office is of course right to prioritise the safeguarding of children—nobody would disagree with that—but the answer must be to work with local authorities to find a solution that keeps people safe, rather than separating families and sending children back to Ukraine.

[Steven Bonnar]

Offering no alternative is placing children at greater risk across Europe, and many people may consider riskier alternatives to get themselves to safety.

Before mid-April, Home Office policy allowed unaccompanied children to apply for the Homes for Ukraine scheme, but that was changed without explanation, and the policy now excludes unaccompanied children. We are waiting on a policy update, but we have not seen any of the detail. With no provision for those who had already applied, the Home Office put applications on hold and left hundreds of children in limbo, as we have already heard. Many are stranded in extremely dangerous situations. More than 500 Ukrainian children are stuck waiting for a decision on their visas.

Since the policy change, a Government spokesman has said:

“Where we are made aware of an individual being provided with incorrect advice, we will of course take action.”

Up until now, no action has been taken by the Home Office. We look forward to hearing what the policy update will be.

Dan Paskins, director of UK impact at Save the Children, said:

“The government’s ‘one size fits all’ approach in these instances can put children at risk of taking dangerous routes to seek safety.”

I have to agree. He also called for more caseworkers

“on the ground, who have the skills, background and knowledge to be able to make a really informed and rapid assessment of each individual case – particularly for children coming to live with adults with whom they have a longstanding relationship.”

Again, I am sure we all agree. Overall, there needs to be a more flexible approach that takes into consideration the fact that parents will not always be able to leave the country with children, particularly with men aged 18 to 60 currently prevented from leaving Ukraine.

How we nurture these children when they arrive in our communities is just as important. Experiencing a humanitarian emergency can significantly impact the mental health, psychological wellbeing and development of a child. Children have been uprooted from their homes, separated from their caregivers and directly exposed to the violence and horrors of war. It is therefore incumbent on all of us to ensure that service providers can facilitate the integration of the needs of displaced children when they arrive here in the UK. That must include ensuring that mental health services are provided in a culturally sensitive manner, and in a language spoken by the children and their families, to foster trust in service providers. Will the Minister outline what steps are being taken to ensure that those services are in place, and to provide psychological first aid training and capacity building for those beyond the specialist mental health workforce who are in contact with children?

I was pleased to learn recently from my own 13-year-old daughter about her new schoolfriend, Maya from Dnipro, who has settled in very well to school life in the heart of my constituency. There are success stories; we all know of them, and we praise the Government for that work, but there are so many problems that still have to be addressed. I look forward to the Government outlining how they intend to do that.

Recent data shows that nearly 10,000 school places have been offered to Ukrainian children. However, it appears that a sizeable number of children have not yet applied or are yet to take up their place. What steps are being taken to encourage and support uptake of school places? That brings us back to funding. In Scotland, we are proud that all 32 of our local authorities participated in the Syrian resettlement programme, with over 3,000 refugees welcomed into our communities. All 32 local authorities in Scotland also committed to participate in the Afghanistan resettlement schemes.

Scotland stands ready to offer refuge and sanctuary to all those who may be displaced. The Scottish Government will work with the Home Office, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other partners to provide people with the safety and security they need to rebuild their lives and hopefully one day return to their homeland. The Home Office must work with us—with local authorities and the devolved Administrations—rather than going over our heads, and it must provide full and sustained funding for integration programmes.

Ministers must engage with local authorities across the United Kingdom to ensure that full and sustained support and funding is made available for Ukrainian children, and for any other child refugee who comes to these shores in the future. As always, it is worth remembering that in Scotland refugees are welcome.

10.21 am

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. Unlike other Members, I welcome the Minister; it is his Department, DLUHC, that is responsible for Homes for Ukraine, and therefore responsible for its faults as well as its successes. Things have gone wrong, as they did in the heartbreaking case of Mariia and Nataliia, which was powerfully described by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq). Like others, I thank her for securing this important debate.

We have heard from my hon. Friend and other Members about a case of utter mismanagement, with logic and compassion thrown out of the windows of Departments that are not working together. In the early stages of the war, we saw cases where people from the UK were desperately trying to get loved ones to safety, but UK embassies were shut—held up by senseless bureaucracy. We saw Ministers telling people fleeing Putin’s brutal invasion to apply for visas to pick fruit. It was far from co-ordinated; it was a shambles. I welcome the announcement yesterday of changes to the rules on letting unaccompanied Ukrainian children into the UK—those changes are needed—but we await further details.

What we saw at the beginning of the war sadly had all the hallmarks of the shambolic and chaotic Government response to the crisis in Afghanistan less than a year before the invasion of Ukraine, with MPs’ emails going unanswered, specific cases not being responded to, and vulnerable people—children—left to fend for themselves. Unless there is urgent action now, Homes for Ukraine risks being another empty slogan from this Government. Like last summer’s Operation Warm Welcome for Afghans, it has been left to run cold. There are still over 10,000 Afghan refugees, including children, left in hotels and B&Bs or, worse still, abandoned to the mercies of the Taliban in Afghanistan. I mention that because that

the Government had the chance to learn from the mistakes of last summer's refugee programme, but sadly, they did not.

The outpouring of support and good will from the British public for the Ukrainian and Afghan refugees was not matched by this Government. Children are still unable to get the visas they desperately need. We have heard about the situation with Mariia and Nataliia. The hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) spoke powerfully about Oksana and the bureaucracy that is holding up her safety. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) highlighted further the bureaucracy that is stopping people offering the safety of their homes to people in desperate need. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made a typically heartfelt and moral case for why this is important. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) talked about trauma, and the importance of providing a place of sanctuary for children fleeing war.

The experience of war, fleeing the country that they knew as home, losing or leaving loved ones, and travelling to a foreign country would be traumatic enough for an adult; I cannot imagine what effect it would have on a child's mental health. We know that the wait for child and adolescent mental health services for children born and raised in the UK is far too long, so it is important for extra, targeted support to be offered to traumatised child refugees. To that end, I would be grateful if the Minister could tell us what steps are being taken to see that mental health service providers are offering support in culturally sensitive ways, and in a language spoken by these children and their families.

As we have heard, recent data shows that 9,900 school places have been offered to Ukrainian children. Schools and schoolchildren have opened their hearts to the refugees, and that is welcome, but that figure is out of 11,400 applications, leaving a sizable number of children who have not applied for or taken up their places in schools. What steps is the Minister's Department taking to encourage and support uptake of school places?

Some 155,600 applications have been received under the Ukraine visa scheme and there have been more than 120,000 generous offers to home refugees, but there still appears to be no definitive data on the number who have been matched and successfully housed. The last we saw was around 33,000 placements in May, so I would be grateful for an update from the Minister. Exactly how many people have been successfully matched and housed under the Homes for Ukraine scheme? How many hosts have been given the support needed to home traumatised children?

When the Homes for Ukraine scheme was first rolled out, I and many others, in the hope of building a robust, safe scheme, asked constructively about the importance of vetting. I know that many councils have not yet received additional support to assess and run checks on those people who have generously offered their homes, to ensure that they can offer stable, safe and appropriate accommodation to home some of the most vulnerable people leaving Ukraine—women and children.

Misha Lagodinsky, who runs a matching scheme called UK Welcomes Ukraine, which has 100 Ukrainian and Russian-speaking volunteers connecting people, said:

"Some people are finding that they are homeless straight away because they have a visa granted and then their host fails DBS checks."

Unfortunately, as we have heard, we have seen breakdowns occur even when successful, safe matches have been made, again rendering refugees homeless. We saw a horrific report about a Ukrainian refugee who was rehomed under a Government scheme but left homeless, along with her teenage son, after they were manipulated for money by their hosts. Having arrived in April, she was asked for money and told to leave after three weeks. That same month, the Local Government Association published a survey of local authorities across the country that reported 144 Ukrainian refugees as homeless following breakdowns with host accommodation.

The Department responsible—the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities—now wants to bring back draconian laws from 1824 to again criminalise rough sleeping. We could well be in the ludicrous position of Ukrainians who have fled their war-torn country falling out with their hosts in this country and then being slapped with a criminal record by the same Department that was supposed to help them in the first place. Vulnerable refugees need to be protected from homelessness, not to flee a warzone only to be criminalised, through no fault of their own, by this Government. When will the Government release the latest figures on the number of Ukrainian refugees who have been made homeless?

If the Home Office gets its way, we will be in danger of seeing Ukrainian refugees on a flight to Rwanda for processing. "Processing" is such a horrible, cruel word when we are talking about victims of war, people trafficking, torture and famine. Where is the compassion? Will the Minister give a cast-iron guarantee that we will see no deportations of refugees who fall through the gaps of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and that none will be forced on to a plane to Rwanda?

We have heard some genuinely harrowing and heartbreaking examples of people who have fallen through the safety net that the British public desperately want to provide for Ukrainian refugees. On occasions, that compassion and ambition has not been matched by the processes put in place by the Government. I know that no Member who has raised individual cases—especially my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn—will stop until their constituents get the help that they need, so my final question to the Minister is this: will the Government meet each Member who has raised a case to see what we all want, which is some peace for the people fleeing this dreadful war?

10.30 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Eddie Hughes):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss these issues today, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on securing the debate—I think we are old friends, given our previous time together on the Women and Equalities Committee. I am a tremendous admirer of the work that she has done supporting her constituent Nazanin.

I thank other Members for their thoughtful contributions, although I am slightly confused by my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), who has been a



[*Eddie Hughes*]

Member of the House for quite some time and who appears to have completely forgotten the protocol that says it is incredibly rude to contribute to a debate and then leave—not least without mentioning it to any of the other contributors or the Chair. Perhaps we will see him again some time. Who knows?

I believe the informed and impassioned contributions to the debate speak to the fact that we have not allowed there to be any creeping normalisation of the plight of the people of Ukraine. Let me put it on the record that the Government truly recognise and value the unanimity of voice with which we speak on the vast majority of issues around our collective support for Ukraine, although I fully accept that the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar) has to take issue with just about everything the Government are doing.

This is one of the rare times in public life when Members from all shades of the political spectrum come together to stand shoulder to shoulder in our defence of the values that we share. From the moment the first tanks crossed the border into Ukraine, the stoicism, courage and determination shown by President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people has been a source of great inspiration to us all. Officials, charities, Ministers and our Prime Minister are working intensively with our allies and international partners to support our friends in Ukraine.

I will come to the focus of the debate, but I want to emphasise that we are proud of the support that the UK Government are providing to Ukrainian nationals and their families. Most of all, we are proud that the scheme is being powered by the enormous generosity of the British public. They have come forward in their thousands to open their hearts and their homes to people who have had their lives torn apart by a conflict they did not ask for. Since the scheme—the first of its kind in the UK—was launched on 18 March, we have welcomed 46,500 people into the UK, and I commend Home Office staff for the work that they have done.

As the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green) said, the scheme is like trying to drive a car at speed and build it at the same time. Although I completely understand that it is not perfect and that there have been challenges, we have been acting at pace with incredible volumes. Combined with the Ukraine family scheme, we have now helped over 70,000 people to find a safe, secure home, with 150,000 visas issued so far. Some of those people are now living in the constituencies of Members who have contributed to the debate, including the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn. Hampstead has had 573 applications, with 537 visas granted, and 382 people have already arrived. The constituency of the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) is slightly further down the league table, Luton having had 72 applications and 32 people arrive, but there is still time to come.

**Sarah Owen:** On the helpful statistics that the Minister has just mentioned, does he have an accurate figure for the number of people who have been successfully homed with hosts through the Homes for Ukraine scheme?

**Eddie Hughes:** I believe the figures are available online, but if they are not, I will make sure that we find out the answer to that question. My apologies for not knowing now.

As Members present are aware, in the early stages of the Homes for Ukraine scheme we had no plans to bring over unaccompanied minors who were not travelling with a parent or legal guardian or joining a parent or legal guardian when they got to the UK. Although unaccompanied minors were not eligible to join the scheme, we have had applications from many children looking for sanctuary in the UK. At the outset we vowed to keep the routes for Ukrainian refugees under constant review, and in the light of clear demand and the clear urgency of the situation, we have decided to extend the Homes for Ukraine scheme to allow children who are not travelling with a parent or legal guardian, or who are travelling to join a parent or legal guardian, to come to the UK.

As I mentioned, we already have a number of outstanding applications from children who applied but were not eligible under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Those applications have been on hold while the Government carefully worked through all the challenges that come with allowing children to travel without a parent.

**Tulip Siddiq:** I thank the Minister for all the new information. Is it official Government policy now that children who are under 18 can come over if they do not have their parents with them? Will they still need a guardian, or will they need a legal guardian note? That has been a source of problems in a lot of cases. Can the Minister give us more information about it? Can he clarify whether this is official Government policy? We hear about it through tweets and the radio, not from a Minister.

**Eddie Hughes:** I can confirm that while we have been discussing these matters, a written ministerial statement has been laid, and Members will be able to access the details of it immediately. Further details of the scheme will be worked out in the coming days to ensure that everything is done correctly, but it will be based on a notarised note from the parent or guardian, and the child travelling to a known person. I am happy to discuss the details with the hon. Lady.

Further to that point, and on the point raised by the hon. Member for Luton North, Members do not need to have asked a question of the Prime Minister to get to discuss their case with Lord Harrington, although it was fortunate that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn had that opportunity. Lord Harrington organises a meeting every week—I understand the next one is tomorrow—and colleagues from across the House may dial in and pose their questions to him. We are encouraging the Labour Whips in particular to get their Members engaged and on that call. The opportunity is weekly, and we are determined to try to help each and every Member.

**Margaret Ferrier:** I welcome the Government's announcement today, and I am glad that Nataliia, the 15-year-old girl being hosted by my constituent, is now in Hamilton in Scotland and settling into her new home. Can the Minister say how long it will take for final decisions on visas to be communicated to other unaccompanied minors, and will their cases be prioritised now?

**Eddie Hughes:** I do not think it would be possible for me to set a timeframe, but I can say that we are going to contact the 1,000 people who have already applied, working through those as quickly as we can. The policy will initially apply to applications in the system that were put on hold, but they will, as the hon. Lady has suggested, be prioritised for processing through the expanded scheme once it opens in July, although we need to ensure that sponsorship arrangements are appropriate, which is complex, and that all safeguarding checks have taken place prior to travel. That might take a few weeks.

All that will be welcome news for many of the children and many of the potential sponsors who are well placed to offer a child safety, sanctuary and security in their home, but I want to be completely clear about the fact that it will be possible only in some carefully defined circumstances, including when children are travelling with or are joining an adult relative, or children travelling alone are travelling to stay with a known sponsor, such as a close family friend. The safety of the child must be paramount.

It is important that we take this opportunity to expand the scheme—

**Olivia Blake:** I am slightly concerned because trusted adults often can be perpetrators of abuse. I want to ensure that there will be continued monitoring of and checks on children who are placed with people outside their family, and that the correct safeguarding and infrastructure are around those children.

**Eddie Hughes:** I completely accept and understand the point that the hon. Lady has made, and it is important that the parents determine who such a person should be. To that end, we would trust that the children were to be placed in a safe environment.

It is important to take this opportunity to expand the scheme. We are particularly grateful for the support of colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and for the support of other expert practitioners, including local authorities, in helping us to develop the expanded format and ensure that the scheme is focused on delivering what is in the best interests of any child. In line with our commitment, the expanded scheme will include an additional requirement for local authorities to assess the suitability of sponsorship arrangements and ensure that robust safeguarding processes are put in place.

There will also be clear requirements for parental consent to any sponsorship arrangement and an expectation that the sponsor should be someone who is personally known to the parents.

**Tulip Siddiq:** The Minister is being very generous in allowing us to intervene. I just want to clarify: if a child is coming over and the person who is housing the child is not related to their parents, can they still come over? The sponsor in my constituency is not related to the parents of the two girls who are coming over. He and his wife have opened up their home, but the girls' parents do not know the sponsors personally. How could they? They are in Ukraine and the sponsors are in London. Would the girls still be allowed to come?

**Eddie Hughes:** I am not sure I can answer that question now. The details will be worked out, but our strong preference is that they are personally known. The point

about parents determining where they place their children might be a pivotal point to consider. As I say, Lord Harrington will be available tomorrow. I am sure the details have been worked out at pace while the car is being driven at speed.

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** Can I interrupt the Minister and say to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate, who has been in this House for a considerable amount of time—25 years, I think—that people who speak in debates are expected to stay for the entirety of the debate? They are not expected to walk out on a whim and wander back in at whim. I hope my hon. Friend, if he wants to speak in Westminster Hall debates, will remain for the entire debate, as every other Member who has spoken in the debate is expected to do, too.

**Crispin Blunt:** Mr Davies, I stand reprimanded. I tried to indicate to you that I would be back for the Minister's response, but I have been caught out by the fact that he is on his feet earlier than I expected.

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** The system in Westminster Hall is not the same as in the Chamber. People do not come back for the wind-ups or for the Minister's response. People are expected to stay for the entire debate. Despite being here for 25 years, my hon. Friend might have learnt something today. I hope that he will not make that mistake again, and that that has been a useful lesson for everybody else who happens to be in the Chamber. Minister, I apologise for interrupting.

**Eddie Hughes:** Mr Davies, I am grateful for that point. Had my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate been here, he might have heard the hon. Member for Luton North point out the fact that I am indeed the Minister with responsibility for the Homes for Ukraine scheme, so it is appropriate for me to answer the case, and it would be inappropriate for a Home Office Minister to take up individual cases during the debate.

Given that the scheme already extends leave to remain to three years, sponsors will be asked to commit to hosting the child for up to three years, or until they are 18. In the coming days we will be setting out the technical details necessary to accompany that kind of change. It almost goes without saying that unaccompanied minors are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. By expanding the visa route for that group, we will be supporting some of those vulnerable children to flee what must be a terrifying situation in their hometowns, cities or villages.

At every stage of the process we have developed our humanitarian schemes in close consultation with Ukrainian leaders and the diaspora community in the UK to make sure that what we offer responds directly to their needs and asks. I do not need to tell anyone in this debate that the war is a constantly evolving situation, but I should stress that that will always mean that our schemes will be kept under constant review, and we will always be willing to work with Ukrainian leaders to make changes whenever necessary.

I want to briefly touch on one or two comments that were made. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn asked why the process has taken so long. The process is complex, but first and foremost we are driven by two things: safeguarding and the safety of the children;

[Eddie Hughes]

and, equally important, we are led by how Ukrainian leaders themselves expect to see the scheme developed, so we have proceeded diligently. As I mentioned, that weekly call with Lord Harrington is incredibly important.

In response to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake), on the presentation of some Ukrainians as homeless, as the Homelessness Minister I consider that a very sensitive issue. We are tracking it carefully and the most recent figures will be published imminently. We will work closely with councils to monitor and identify any further pressures they might be under. The Government have committed more than £300 million this year to support homelessness and rough sleeping, through the rough sleeping initiative and so on. We will keep a close eye on that to see how the pressures develop.

With regard to provisions for deposits for those whose sponsorship might have broken down, measures such as discretionary housing payments are available to councils. Ideally, we do not end up in that situation. I appreciate that the rematching service has so far helped a relatively small number of people, but it is still relatively new in development. We will work on that with councils, because ideally people will be rematched. I want to finish by thanking Members for their passion and commitment. I hope that today's decision will be widely welcomed across the House.

10.46 am

**Tulip Siddiq:** I thank everyone for their contributions to a very good debate. I especially want to mention Lord Dubs, who was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). He helped me prepare for the debate and has tirelessly worked on this issue. He came to this country on the Kindertransport, and has never given up fighting for refugees and unaccompanied children.

Despite being told off, the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) made a good point about a focus on families involved in the armed forces. A couple of people in the cases we have dealt with have parents in the armed forces fighting on the frontline. We should support them and bring them over. I want to thank my

hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall, who powerfully described the delays in housing refugees, which I recognise. Deeming sponsors unsuitable without a proper reason means that children are abandoned as a result. I hope the Minister will look into that.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green) highlighted the failure to link family cases. That causes unnecessary delays and is something that I have experienced time and time again. I know we are giving the Minister a lot to look into, but I hope he includes that. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) spoke about the duty of care that we have for children once they are in the UK. It is not just about bringing them over, but looking after them when they are here, because they are traumatised.

We should look at access to education; the catch-up school in summer is a good idea. I do not know whether the Minister will take up that idea but I hope, in general, that he takes on board everything he has heard today. I welcome the policy announced today, and would like to see the final details, to ensure that it works for everyone. I recognise that the Government must weigh up safeguarding and child protection risks in the design of any scheme, but the current system is simply not working. I hope the Minister recognises that. It is too bureaucratic, is rigid and has a cruel approach to child refugees, which is putting children's safety and lives at risk.

I hope that the new policy works, and that the Minister will publish all the details. I also hope that he will look especially at the consideration that although families in Ukraine might not know their sponsors personally, the sponsors will still be providing safe homes for children in the UK, and local authorities can vouch for them. I thank everyone for putting aside political differences, and for ensuring that Mariia's experience is not matched by that of other children across the UK, and that it never happens again.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Homes for Ukraine scheme and child refugees.

10.48 am

*Sitting suspended.*



## UK Defence Industry: Procurement

11 am

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** People may have noticed that because of what I, as a Yorkshireman, consider to be oppressive heat, I am not forcing Members to wear a jacket in this debate if they would prefer not to.

**Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered procurement and the UK defence industry.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Davies. I should start by declaring an interest, in that my partner is a serving member of the armed forces and currently deployed overseas.

When the UK left the European Union at the beginning of 2020, the Conservative Government had the chance to deliver a stronger, better, independent Britain, built on the principles of sovereignty, security and prosperity. Two years later, the UK has time and again proven that it has done that, most recently through our instrumental support of Ukraine in Europe's most significant war in recent memory. The importance of the UK armed forces has been highlighted in a way that cements their vitality and necessity and confirms that the UK can now retain its autonomy and sovereignty, further bettering our nation.

Away from the confinements of the European Union and the European procurement directive, we can commit to improving and harnessing the potential of UK defence. Procurement of defence weapons is critical to strong armed forces. Procurement of high-quality, trusted, organically sourced defence weapons is instrumental in world-class armed forces. Each year, the Ministry of Defence spends billions of pounds buying new equipment and supporting existing equipment for the armed forces. That is a substantial amount of money, but never before has ensuring that our defence capabilities are world class been more important. There are challenges to acquiring defence equipment: it is expensive, complex and subject to politics. However, locally sourced, organic procurement is a sure way of supporting the British armed forces, our local communities and our allies.

In the last two years, the Government have significantly altered their priorities, as attested to by the integrated review, the defence Command Paper and the defence and security industrial strategy. In accordance with the DSIS, the UK is adopting a new strategic framework for the MOD's procurement and acquisitions programme. That will be a dramatic but necessary change. No longer will we follow the policy of competition by default. Instead, we will adopt a more flexible approach that assesses procurement on a case-by-case basis. By outlining our strategic imperatives, such as nuclear and offensive cyber, the Government recognise that there is a strength to retaining defence industries on UK shores. That not only aids us from a national security point of view, but allows businesses to direct their innovation to areas where the Government have demonstrated an interest.

In my constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire, the armed forces are celebrated widely. In my constituency, I am proud to have Brecon barracks, the home of the Army in Wales, and to represent the strong military

community that comes with it. In fact, I think I am one of the few Members of the House whose constituency has RAF, Navy and Army sites.

In addition to having the barracks, we are fortunate to be home to innovative defence procurement businesses. This week, I have had the pleasure of speaking to Compact Orbital Gears, based in Rhayader, and Charcroft Electronics, both of which work in the defence procurement industry. Each deals with different elements of the defence procurement supply chain, and produces and distributes to major companies in the UK and abroad. Charcroft Electronics is a distributor and manufacturer of electronic components and specialises in high reliability and harsh environments. It supports programmes such as Typhoon and the Brimstone missile system, which is being deployed in Ukraine. It is proud to be a 100% UK-based company, and it employs 76 people in Wales, plus a further four in England—they are not lucky enough to work in Wales. Charcroft Electronics and Compact Orbital Gears are excellent examples of British companies working to better British security by supplying to our defence industry. UK companies working for UK national security is a strength, the fact of which should not be minimised.

The invasion of Ukraine has laid bare the strength of our armed forces, and it is right that we are proud of that and continue to use our strength to remain a key voice in NATO and ensure the safety of our partner countries. Our seat in NATO and every other major organisation, such as the G7, the UN Security Council and the G20, proves our multilateral influence and should inspire the Government to further commit to British procurement for British security, to protect us and to continue our international influence. To do that, we must keep supporting the UK defence procurement industry. To do that, we must keep supporting the UK defence procurement industry. We will be supporting not only ourselves, but our allies and, critically, the communities that rely on that industry.

**Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con):** My hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech. We have seen a sea change in procurement, and the results are coming through on the ground. I have MIRA in my patch, which is involved in Spiral 3 and the development of unmanned ground vehicles. The benefit of the way the UK system works is that it allows new, small-scale entrants to build up and move into procurement, which they have not been able to do before. That is a step change, and we are leading the world in that sense. Does my hon. Friend believe the Government should do more to allow more entry from local businesses? Local supply networks, such as the one in Leicestershire, in which we all build together as a community, will give us agile procurement fit for the future.

**Fay Jones:** I completely support my hon. Friend's point, and I am delighted that Compact Orbital Gears in my constituency works closely with MIRA in his constituency. That is the type of arrangement that the Government should be facilitating, and I fully endorse his words.

I firmly believe that, as my hon. Friend pointed out, that if we support the UK's small and medium-sized enterprises and harness our international influence, the UK has the potential to be the defence marketplace for

[Fay Jones]

our NATO partners. We have the intellectual prowess and manufacturing capability to become the hub for defence innovation globally. I understand from Charcroft Electronics that it has seen an increase in trade with our European partners due to its profile in UK markets, and it is looking to expand its production due to demand. To quote its director, orders from German and UK customers

“have gone through the roof”,

and it is at capacity until the end of next year.

Charcroft has demonstrated to me that there is a clear sense of security in a country knowing that its parts are not stored or being built abroad, and therefore potentially subject to disruptive geopolitical shocks. It is harnessing its influence at home and abroad to work closely with other UK defence businesses and those in our neighbouring countries. It is engaging in research and development for future defence programmes. Charcroft’s success is obvious and well deserved, and I am grateful to the Government for committing to supporting SMEs across the UK via the SME action plan, so that we can improve engagement and ensure that the whole defence supply chain is guaranteed the quality and service delivered by our UK businesses.

While I commend Charcroft, Compact Orbital Gears, and other businesses across Wales that are supplying the defence sector, there are limitations on procurement in UK defence. To continue the success and development of those businesses, we need to ensure that our skills-based economy is up to scratch, so that it matches our intellectual capacity. It is apparent that there are limitations on growth due to the difficulty in hiring highly skilled individuals in rural areas. I welcome the Government’s commitment to investing in our defence sector, and recognise their commitment to apprenticeships, which will combat skilled jobs shortages. I understand from ADS Group, a trade organisation for companies in the UK defence sector, that around 5,000 apprentices are employed in that sector. That is evidence of a budding workforce.

However, in constituencies such as mine, the picture is different. There are myriad reasons for that; in rural communities, problems include inaccessibility and a lack of connectivity. Charcroft told me that despite its best efforts,

“apprentices are hard to come by.”

We need to be committed to nurturing our home-grown talent, so that we can strengthen our defence industry, and so that businesses can expand and develop easily without that anxiety.

**Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that the new medium helicopter programme is a very good example of how we can support skills development, and the sustainment of those skills—particularly design skills—in the defence manufacturing sector? My college in Yeovil works closely with Leonardo to provide apprenticeships in exactly the sorts of areas that my hon. Friend is describing, and if the MOD becomes the reference customer, there is a massive opportunity for major export business to be done off the back of that in future. That would sustain jobs throughout Wales and the south-west, as well as the wider UK.

**Fay Jones:** I certainly agree with my hon. Friend; I saw that when I was part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme and went on a visit to, if not his constituency, somewhere very near it. A key part of the Government’s levelling-up agenda is their doing whatever they can to remove the barriers to recruiting and retaining talent in rural areas. I would really like that extended to the defence procurement sector. It is by investing in the next generation that we will harness our talent and ensure that the UK remains the epicentre of defence in Europe, a position that has been solidified in recent months.

Just outside my constituency, in Merthyr, the Ajax armoured vehicle programme is being developed. The site employs 600 people and is considered a key employer in the area. It employs highly skilled people, many of whom live in my constituency. I understand the difficult position the Government are in on the future of Ajax. It is extremely expensive, and continuing with a project that continually reveals design flaws is sub-optimal to say the least. I fully understand that the Government are in a difficult position, but we would all like an end to the uncertainty about the future of Ajax. There is a real opportunity for further investment in this skillset, so that we can overcome the issues that we have seen. Home-grown talent breeds better security. I understand that Ministers are looking closely at Ajax, but closing that program would have some negative consequences, as I know the Minister understands.

The prosperity review of 2018 suggested that prosperity should be taken into consideration when deciding on procurement contracts. As DSIS outlines, in order to ensure a prosperous, secure Britain, we should encourage the placing of contracts with UK suppliers, rather than buying from overseas suppliers. If we factor in the local prosperity arising from training, jobs, further opportunities for UK exports and increased industrial productivity, UK defence spending can be used to the greater benefit of the wider economy and the many local economies that have a part in the UK’s defence industry.

There are undeniable benefits from ensuring that procurement for the defence industry operates and develops within the UK. I would like the same logic to be extended to the operational ration packs that our military use on active duty. The Minister will remember those ration packs probably slightly too well. One of the reasons why I sought to secure this debate was that my kitchen is full of leftover ration packs from various exercises across Salisbury plain and the Brecon Beacons. Going through them one day, I noticed that the majority of the food we give our soldiers does not come from this country. I understand that we are dealing with a particular need; soldiers certainly do not have the time to eat a three-course meal, nor would they want to. We have to consider operational needs. We are looking to keep our military personnel fed, but it is important that they are well fed.

Anything we can do to use more of the high-quality, nutritious food that we produce in this country should be celebrated, and it would further extend the Government’s commitment to working with UK businesses. I understand that the country of origin of each ingredient in the ration packs is considered. So too is our national security, as it should be. It would be fantastic if the Government looked to extend their commitment on UK defence procurement to cover the food that we give our armed forces. I have previously drawn attention in this House

to food security. I am delighted that the Government recognised the importance of domestic food production in the food strategy published last week. It is time we extended our self-sufficiency beyond defence equipment to the food we give our armed forces. I hope that the Minister will consider that issue in his response.

I am extremely proud of this Government's record on British procurement in the defence sector; it is of vital importance to jobs and prosperity in my constituency. I leave the Minister with two clear points. First, in order to sustain the prosperity that the Government are determined to deliver, we should remove the barriers that companies working in the defence procurement space face in recruiting apprentices, and in recruiting from rural areas. Secondly, the Government should complement their commitment to food security by increasing the amount of food for our armed forces that is sourced in Britain, in order to ensure secure and prosperous armed forces.

11.14 am

**The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty):** I am pleased to respond to this important debate and very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) for securing it. This is Armed Forces Week, so I would like briefly to reflect on the important contributions of our military, especially the Welsh elements, in recent times.

Last summer, we saw the magnificent performance of the Royal Welsh in helping to evacuate refugees from Afghanistan during Operation Pitting, and during covid we saw the remarkable performance of the 160th (Welsh) Brigade, which came to the fore delivering personal protective equipment and driving ambulances. We also have the incredible RAF pilots at RAF Valley. The home of excellence in the British infantry is, of course, the school in Brecon, which I know very well, to my own discomfort. I am very pleased that in recent times we have been able to reaffirm our absolute commitment to Brecon barracks. Of course, we are grateful to my hon. Friend and note her energetic campaigning on behalf of Brecon barracks.

That decision, coupled with our plans for Future Soldier, with an upturn in the percentage of our forces based in Wales, and an announcement of contracts worth £695 million to support the Hawk T2 in RAF Valley, as well as the opening of the new Royal Navy Reserve base in Cardiff Bay, to the tune of £11 million, reaffirms our commitment to Wales in the context of UK defence.

However, as my hon. Friend rightly pointed out in her eloquent remarks, that military presence delivers not just security, but local prosperity. In 2019-20, Ministry of Defence direct expenditure supported more than 5,000 Welsh jobs, and just last year we spent £866 million with local industry, which equates to £270 for every person in Wales. That just gives a sense of the scale of the level of investment in Wales.

Of course, defence is a UK endeavour; it is not just about Wales. So I should point out that in Scotland the equivalent expenditure was £1.99 billion, driving forward our remarkable Trident programme, which delivers our unique and magnificent deterrent capability. In Northern Ireland we delivered £64 million of expenditure. For the whole United Kingdom we delivered £20.5 billion just last year.

I should also declare my particular interest, because in my constituency we have the birthplace of British aviation as well as the home of the British Army, in the shape of Farnborough. The remarkable excellence of UK defence industries as a whole will be showcased magnificently during the Farnborough air show next month. I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members will be able to join me and others at the Farnborough air show to celebrate the remarkable standard of excellence and the economic contribution that the defence industry makes to the prosperity of our constituents.

**Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP):** Reflecting on the point that the Minister has just made, I wonder whether he would like to express his esteem for the 10,000 manufacturing jobs in Scotland that support defence operations in the United Kingdom as they take effect across the world and, in so doing, recognise that those jobs are not a benevolent charitable gesture; instead, they are a reflection of the skills and expertise that exist in education, manufacturing and engineering in Scotland, and they are an indispensable component of the procurement process. Will he also reflect on the fact that the UK manages very well on several platforms—whether Typhoon; its predecessor, Tornado; or its successor, Tempest—to work very well with other nations in defence procurement?

**Leo Docherty:** Yes, indeed. I join the hon. Gentleman in commending, and reaffirming our commitment to and admiration for, those 10,000 defence jobs. He rightly points out that they exist because of the standard of international excellence that those workers achieve, particularly as part of our deterrent. I hope that he will take a public opportunity—maybe not now, but perhaps in future—to put on the record his commitment to the deterrent. It may not be easy for him to do that, so I will move swiftly on.

**Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** Before the Minister moves swiftly on from the deterrent, I would like to take him back to aerospace. In the past he has been generous with his time and has met me to discuss the subject of the war widows, a subject that falls more within his own bailiwick. I have been trying to get a meeting with his colleague, the Minister for Defence Procurement, my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin), so that a British-based aerospace firm can show him a presentation that greatly impressed me when I chaired the Defence Committee. I have no financial or commercial interest in the company concerned, but I am worried that independent, smaller companies get squeezed out by the big operators, and I would not ask for such a meeting if I did not think that company had something important to offer to defence.

**Leo Docherty:** I am happy to recommit our determination to ensure that SMEs are a part of our collective success. I am sure that the Minister for Defence Procurement will be delighted if I commit on his behalf to him meeting our right hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire mentioned Ajax. We entirely understand the concerns that she has expressed and we have made no secret of the fact that it is a troubled programme. Despite those troubles, we are proud to be in Merthyr Tydfil because of the excellence of the workforce. I can offer some



[*Leo Docherty*]

reassurance, in the sense that the Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister for Defence Procurement continue to meet with our commercial partners, but the bottom line, very clearly, is that we will not accept a vehicle that is not fit for purpose. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement will keep colleagues updated as progress is made.

I agree entirely with the main thrust of the speech we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire, which was about supporting SMEs as an integral part of our supply chain. They are indeed the lifeblood of the Welsh defence industry. She referred to the fact that there has been a growth in the proportion of supply they make up, which I am pleased about. We want to increase the proportion of defence expenditure that goes into SMEs to 25% by the end of this year.

That will not happen by accident. It is happening because we are fortunate to have many SMEs who are agile and producing products that we absolutely want. My hon. Friend mentioned Charcroft Electronics and Compact Orbital Gears in her constituency. They are two very good examples of first-rate SMEs. I should also mention Radnor Range Ltd at Presteigne, which provides range facilities for the testing and evaluation of weapons and is another good example of a first-class SME with which we partner.

My hon. Friend can rest assured that institutionally we will continue to support companies big and small, and we have strategies such as the defence equipment plan, and the defence and security industrial strategy, which colleagues will be familiar with, alongside subsector plans to provide industry with the transparency it craves in order that it can clearly understand what capabilities we need and then respond to that.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, we are also using the opportunity provided by our departure from the European Union to develop better defence and security procurement regulations, which will be tailored to better meet our own needs. That will lead to the Procurement Bill, which will replace the existing set of complex public procurement ordinances with a single uniform framework. It will be simpler to use for both the Ministry of Defence and suppliers and it will make the acquisition process much faster, helping to unleash the innovative potential of British businesses. That is a concrete and important legislative step forward, which I am sure colleagues will welcome.

Our Department is also doing all it can to encourage larger defence primes to invest in and develop SMEs. As my hon. Friend pointed out, our refreshed SME action plan, which we launched at the beginning of the year, will be pivotal to this work. We are doing that to help smaller companies maximise future business prospects, ensuring that we can maintain an agile supply chain, which will help us meet the evolving threats that we face. To help innovative companies succeed, we have

ringfenced £6.6 billion for research and development spending. That money will help industry produce the kinds of game-changing capabilities that are necessary to keep us ahead of the curve of innovation.

My hon. Friend mentioned exports. I was pleased to hear about the company that has a full order book. We commend that, and we are trying to do everything we can to offer more export opportunities to a greater number of players. We have committed to developing a standardised commercial mechanism for Government-to-Government defence and security sales, which should make it much easier for customers and partners to do business with us.

My hon. Friend mentioned operational ration packs. I confirm that I do know them through a great deal of personal experience, and I am actually a big fan. When it comes to procurement, it is only right that we have a nuanced approach. For some generic procurement, we are bound to a degree by public procurement regulation, but British food, of course, needs no introduction and has the competitive advantage of being great value for money. That is borne in mind more broadly across defence for not just the operational ration packs, but our provisioning for the entire defence establishment. We are reviewing the way we feed our force, and access to fresh, local British produce will be a key component of that. I am grateful for her remarks on the matter.

On skills, I applaud the apprenticeship programme that my hon. Friend mentioned. I have similar programmes in my own constituency, and I am pleased to confirm that we are working with the Department for Education to develop STEM programmes in local schools and colleges. I hope hon. Members would agree that the RAF has been ahead of the game on that matter. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) mentioned the success of the commercial and institutional partnership that takes place at Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton—between Leonardo, the Royal Air Force and local schools—to drive the collective success of the Fleet Air Arm and the Commando Helicopter Force at that critically important Royal Navy air station, which one of the busiest air bases in Europe. I am grateful for his comments.

I want to be clear that we are absolutely on the same lines. We are excited about the prospect of a greater number of SMEs being involved in the collective success of defence procurement. It is an exciting and innovative time for defence investment, driving forward the kind of operational output we need to fulfil our ambitious plans in the Future Soldier programme and the defence Command Paper. It is sensible to say that defence procurement not just in England but in Wales has a very bright future indeed.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.27 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## NHS Dentistry in England

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

[*Relevant document: e-petition 564154, Independent review of the NHS dental contract.*]

2.30 pm

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered NHS dentistry in England.

It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I am delighted to bring this debate to Parliament and to combine it with a petition that has been signed by more than 10,000 members of the public. The petition calls for

“an independent review of the existing”

NHS dental

“contract and a radical rethink of the way in which dental services are delivered.”

We may not need an independent review to tell us that NHS dental services need a radical rethink; we all know that they do.

NHS dentistry is a huge concern for all Members here today, and the number of us present reflects what a huge concern it is for our constituents. I already had a good indication of how significant the lack of dentistry was across my constituency, but to grasp the detail and the scale of it, I posted a survey at the beginning of the year asking constituents about the problems they had faced in accessing NHS dentistry. Within a day, it had received more responses than any other survey I had run—more than surveys on bus services, post office closures, noise pollution, or whether the Cornish flag should appear on a Cornish numberplate.

The picture that came out of my survey was shocking. Nearly half of respondents had been waiting more than three years for an appointment. Tim has had temporary crowns awaiting replacement for eight years; the teeth underneath have rotted away. Robert’s solution was to wait until a tooth was

“beyond repair and intolerably painful before getting an appointment with the emergency dentist to have it extracted. Last time they removed three in one go.”

Other people tried DIY solutions. Looking up how to make temporary fillings on YouTube was commonplace. Mark pulled out his wisdom tooth himself.

Other constituents have given up completely. They do not show up on the waiting lists because they have given up on waiting. Lauren told me:

“I don’t use the right side of my mouth to chew as it’s sensitive and causes me pain but it is too difficult to get an appointment so I am having to live with it”.

Anna racked up three times her usual phone bill trying to get through to the appointments line before she gave up. One constituent comes from a family of seven, of whom only the youngest has ever seen a dentist, and only then because he went to hospital for urgent surgery; the oldest is 20. Patients who can afford to go private do so, but so do patients who cannot afford it. The fees for Anthony’s private dental care represent a tenth of his pension; that is not affordable. The fees that Megan paid to remedy just one of her abscesses equated to a month’s rent. She has just had a baby, and cannot afford to pay another two months’ rent for the other two abscesses.

The situation is particularly grave in Cornwall. Last week, NHS England and NHS Improvement presented a report to Cornwall Council showing that in 2020-21 only 24% of the dental activity commissioned in Cornwall was delivered. In 2021-22, it has increased, but only to 59%. By the end of this month, we should be returning to 100% of normal activity, but that is simply not happening in Cornwall. The total number of adults with access to an NHS dentist dropped from 188,000 in June of last year to 155,000 in December.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Things are clearly not as they should be in Cornwall, but in Lincolnshire they are even worse. Greater Lincolnshire has three of the four worst dental deserts in the United Kingdom, according to the Association of Dental Groups, with just 38 dentists per 100,000 people. Finding a dentist in Lincolnshire is like finding the holy grail. It is vital that we have more dentists, for the reasons my hon. Friend set out. People deserve better.

**Derek Thomas:** I completely agree. My right hon. Friend will know that in Cornwall we are very competitive; we always want to win, but I do not want to win this competition. This tragedy for both Cornish residents and his constituents highlights the fact that something needs to be done urgently. I thank him for his intervention.

**Damian Green** (Ashford) (Con): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again and allowing me to continue this tour of woe around the country. I can tell him that the situation is equally bad in Kent; it is almost impossible in Ashford to find an NHS dentist. My frustration and that of my constituents about this is compounded by the lack of response of the health service generally. The clinical commissioning group refers me to NHS England, and NHS England—the Minister may take note—just does not reply. I have before me an email I sent seven weeks ago regarding someone who could not find a dentist, but there has not even been a reply from NHS England. From top to bottom, this system needs complete reform.

**Derek Thomas:** I appreciate that intervention. In my case, NHS England, and commissioners for the south-west have been fairly good and engaged with the challenge. However, it is a tale of woe, as my right hon. Friend says. Perhaps we can all commit to coming back to this place in a year or two to commend the Minister and celebrate the fact we have a new contract that addresses exactly the challenges that we are all quite rightly highlighting today.

**Dr Dan Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He is right to highlight this national challenge. We have substantial challenges with access to NHS dentistry in Suffolk. Part of that, as our right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said, relates to the quality of the commissioning and monitoring of contracts by the local commissioner. Will my hon. Friend join me in urging the Minister to put pressure on local commissioners to take this issue seriously? Also, does he agree that we need to ensure that dentists who are commissioned to perform NHS

[Dr Dan Poulter]

services do actually provide the services that they are commissioned to provide? Some of them are not doing so at the moment.

**Derek Thomas:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is right to say that there are commissioned units of dental activity that are not being delivered. There are all sorts of reasons for that, which I hope to cover in my speech. Ultimately, however, we need to look at the contract itself and consider whether it actually works for patients. The contract was introduced by the Labour party in 2006. We know that it does not work today and is in urgent need of reform, which I will come on to in my remarks.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Derek Thomas:** I will make a little progress first and then I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

We have heard about other examples and concerns elsewhere, but in Cornwall we do not have the capacity to assess the patients in the backlog, let alone to treat them. This is not just about dental health. Dental examinations pick up the early warning signs of mouth cancer, or poor periodontal health associated with diabetes, for example. I should declare an interest, Mr Stringer, as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on diabetes. It is estimated that 60,000 people with type 2 diabetes had their diagnosis missed or delayed because of the cancellation of dental examinations.

I will now give way to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

**Jim Shannon:** I know that this debate is about NHS dentistry in England, but may I say—regionally—that the problems are just as real in Northern Ireland as they are anywhere else? My concern is that there is no access to NHS dentistry any more in Northern Ireland; either people pay for dentistry, for example through a subscription, or they do not get it.

Does the hon. Member agree that dental care should not be restricted to those who have the money to pay? The impact of this situation will clearly fall on those who see dentistry as being the bottom of the list when it comes to paying? People in the poverty trap who feel the pressures of rising prices will be even more detrimentally affected than ever. Does he feel that now is the time for Government all across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—although I appreciate that the Minister who is here today does not have responsibility for Northern Ireland—to do something specifically for people on the breadline?

**Derek Thomas:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

It is probably fair to say that although the responsibility lies with the Minister here today, it is not her responsibility, or even in her power, to ensure that every member of the British public can access NHS dentistry, simply because NHS England, or indeed any part of the NHS, does not commission enough dentistry to cover the whole population. Perhaps the Minister will clarify today the Government's expectation regarding access to

NHS dental care, and say whether there is a right for everybody, whoever they might be, to access that care. However, it is a very important point that has been raised. It surprises people that we do not commission enough dentistry to meet the needs of every one of our constituents.

It is not enough to blame the pandemic, although it has certainly not helped. I was raising the state of NHS dentistry in Cornwall before we had a single case of covid in this country. Over two years ago, I spoke about the difficulty of recruiting and retaining dental staff. At Prime Minister's questions two years ago, I raised the shocking results of the lack of access to NHS dentistry for children in Cornwall. I also told hon. Members that these inequalities needed to be addressed quickly and creatively.

Outside this House, I have been working to improve access to dentistry in the constituency, most recently by getting the council to overturn a decision not to allow electrical works to proceed in St Ives that would have delayed the opening of a new dental surgery until the autumn. I have been meeting the regional health commissioners and Cornwall's public health officers to discuss dentistry on a regular basis, and I cannot fault their speed and creativity. Their south-west dental reform programme has been working hard to improve access by helping to reopen a surgery in Hayle and in St Ives, piloting child-focused dental practices, and developing its own evidence-based workforce plan, but the Government must lead the way. Resolving these oral health inequalities is not just this Minister's responsibility; it will require a cross-Government approach.

NHS England has launched a drive to recruit dental professionals to the south-west, but a key challenge in Cornwall, and maybe other parts of the country, is finding housing for those who want to take up a job in dentistry. I am working on that issue with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The national food strategy was a wasted opportunity. We could have extended the sugar tax, which has successfully incentivised the reformulation of sugary drinks. That would have helped oral health as much as health in general. I shall continue to argue for a national food strategy that is truly strategic, even if the Government have made a tactical withdrawal from tax rises to support public health.

The Minister has responsibility for the dental contract. In oral questions in January, she agreed that the contract was

"the nub of the problem".—[*Official Report*, 18 January 2022; Vol. 707, c. 195.]

She said in February,

"there is no doubt that the UDA method of contract payments is a perverse disincentive for dentists. The more they do, the less they seem to be paid. I for one certainly do not underestimate the problems that that causes dentists, and I can see why many hand back their NHS contracts."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 2022; Vol. 708, c. 780.]

I could not have put it better myself. I have asked dentists in my constituency if they would prefer to see increased budgets or reform of the UDA contract, and they asked for reform.

There are two main issues with the dental contract, both of which are not just obstacles to dental health but actively create problems for the future. First, the current system does not focus on prevention. When units of



dental activity are the sole measure of contract performance, there is no incentive for preventative work; nor is there an incentive to make the best use of the whole dental team's skills when the practice cannot make a claim for payment for a course of treatment purely because it was initiated by someone other than a dentist.

I made sure that the title of the debate referred to NHS dentistry not NHS dentists. We need to recognise the contribution of the whole team of dental professionals—dental nurses, hygienists, therapists and technicians—and use them. Again, this is about not just saving money, but using professionals in the best way we can. Yesterday I spoke to a dental nurse who works with people in care homes. If she wants a resident to switch to a high-fluoride toothpaste, she has to get a dentist to prescribe it. Our regional dental commissioning team has been running a pilot to take supervised toothbrushing conducted by dental nurses out to the community. Given that more five to nine-year-olds are admitted to hospital for tooth decay than for any other reason, this work should be at the heart of NHS dentistry, not something that is topped up by flexible commissioning.

Second, the UDA method does not properly reward dental practices for their work. A dental practice is faced, in effect, with a UDA cap for an entire course of treatment, which means when a patient has complex needs, the money involved does not even cover the overheads of the practice. The predictable result is that dental practices are moving away from NHS work. Around 3,000 dentists in England have stopped providing NHS services since the start of the pandemic. Every time a dentist leaves the NHS and is not replaced, approximately 2,000 people lose access to dental care. If you cannot do the arithmetic in your head, Mr Stringer, 3,000 times by 2,000 is 6 million, so 6 million patients have lost access to a dentist just over the course of the pandemic. For every dentist leaving the NHS, another 10 are reducing their NHS commitment by a quarter on average; that is another 500 patients losing access to an NHS dentist. According to the British Dental Association, 75% of dentists plan to reduce the amount of NHS work they do next year.

The fewer dental practices there are doing NHS work, the more pressure the remaining practices are under. A recent BDA members survey found that nine in 10 owners of dental practices committed to NHS work found recruitment difficult, with 29% of vacancies going unfilled for more than a year. That is nationwide, but one provider in Cornwall told me that their surgeries were unused 52% of the time due to shortages of dentists and nurses. The vast majority said that it was the UDA contract that was the biggest factor in their recruitment difficulties. The Minister said last week that the Government are serious about reforming the dental contract, but I want to press that point. It is not enough to be seriously planning a reform; we must be planning serious reform. Tweaks to the existing system are not enough when the contract is fundamentally flawed.

I have focused on the contract because we need the Minister to focus on the contract. Other Members will no doubt raise the issue of recognising overseas qualifications, passing the section 60 order that would give the General Dental Council discretion over qualifications, maintaining the mutual recognition of professional qualifications with Europe and extending that to the Commonwealth, and expediting the process for experienced candidates

to register with the NHS. Dental care professionals need to be allowed to initiate treatments. The issue of funding will come up—for a catch-up programme of overseas registration exams in the short term, and university places in the long term—but it is striking how many of those proposals are cost neutral. We could even save money by catching mouth cancer in the early stages when it is more easily treated.

To quote the Minister, the contract is the nub of the problem. I urge her to commit to a firm date when we will see the end of units of dental activity, and a better contract focused on prevention and increasing access.

**Graham Stringer (in the Chair):** I have indications from six Members who wish to speak. I intend to call the Opposition spokesperson at 3.40 pm. You can do the arithmetic—it is fairly straightforward—I do not intend to impose a time limit unless Members indulge themselves.

2.47 pm

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) for opening the debate and making many of the points that I intended to make. The simple fact is that we do not have time for further delay. We have four and half weeks left until the summer recess, and our constituents want answers. They want answers because they need to see a dentist but they are experiencing the deficit of NHS dentistry across the country. I would add to the list of areas mentioned that Yorkshire is also deeply affected, and my city, York, is struggling.

In 2009, Labour committed to reform the dental contract, realising that it was not going to deliver what it aspired to. The coalition Government followed in 2010 with a similar commitment, yet here we are in 2022 still making the same argument that we desperately need reform. As has already been said, this is not just something that has emerged through the pandemic; it is an issue that predates us. That is why it is essential that we have a pathway from today showing how we are going to move out of the crisis. Our constituents deserve to know what the Government's agenda is.

Two years ago, NHS dentistry fell by 13%. Since covid-19 there has been a mass exodus in my city of York, but I realise that has also occurred across the country. Last April, NHS dentistry fell by a further 19%. It is believed that since the start of the pandemic, NHS commitments have fallen by 45%. Next year, 75% of dentists are planning to make changes and reduce their NHS commitments. Of those, some 45% say they will go fully private and 47% say they will change career or take early retirement, so if we wait another 12 months we will be in a deeper mess than we are now.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have lost 43 million dental appointments, 30 million of which were for children. In my constituency, 41% of children have not seen a dentist in the last year—they are the children who are now presenting in more acute services, requiring even more expensive interventions.

To put the situation in York into context, 9,695 UDAs were delivered in March 2021, at a time when 45% of UDAs needed to be delivered. A year later, in April 2022, 8,730 UDAs were delivered, fewer than the year

[*Rachael Maskell*]

before, and yet the requirement was for 95% of UDAs to be delivered. Instead of the number of my constituents accessing NHS dentistry going up when the number of UDAs that were expected to be delivered more than doubled, it has gone down. With 965 fewer UDAs, despite a doubling of the expectation, will the Minister explain how my constituents are meant to get access to services?

Fewer than half my constituents have seen a dentist in the last year. Of course, dentists have offered them private dental plans but my constituents simply cannot afford that, not least because of the cost of living crisis and the housing crisis in my city. Some travel long distances and others get nothing at all, and we know about other health inequalities that are similarly embedded.

**Sir John Hayes:** It is the least well-off people who suffer most, as the hon. Lady rightly said. Working-class people cannot afford these expensive plans. Surely the answer is that we should train more of our own dentists and make it more attractive to work for the NHS, rather than go private. My own dentist is Turkish by origin. He is a fine NHS dentist, and I could not speak more highly of him, but we cannot simply import dentists; we need to train more.

**Rachael Maskell:** The right hon. Member is absolutely right that we have to train more dentists. One reason for that is that it takes about 10 years for somebody to be fully professionally competent and able to provide the highest level of dentistry. We must not look just at what is happening now, but into the future too.

Before we get to that point, we have to look at retention and at bringing people back from private contracts and services into NHS contracts. With fewer dentists available, the toll and the mental stress felt by those who have stayed in the NHS and remained committed to it is building. Some 87% of dentists experience mental stress, and 86% have experienced abuse as a result of people being so frustrated by the time they reach the dentist's door. The people working in dental reception areas are at the forefront of that, and I know of a practice in York that cannot recruit anyone to be on the front desk. We need significant changes to be brought forward, and that will require money and dedication.

It is not just about the contract; it is also about having a complete strategy around dentistry. I have never understood why oral health was taken outside the wider NHS, and I believe that the solution to the problems we face is to have a proper NHS dental strategy and to put the NHS dental service back into the heart of the NHS. However, while we are working on those issues, we have to look at the crisis before us.

In Parliament last week I mentioned a practice that has been fantastic at accommodating people with dental needs throughout the pandemic. I said that three dentists were leaving that practice; I was wrong—it is now four. That is the pace of people leaving the profession. We have heard about the wider consequences for oral health, and particularly oral cancers, for which a delayed diagnosis means the worst prognosis. Therefore, it is absolutely right that we see a move on this issue.

I want to raise a couple of issues about dentists waiting to come to the UK. We know that 700 dentists are waiting to sit exams. The Government have had a

consultation, which has closed, and we are awaiting a response. I am sure everybody in the House would want to accelerate legislation on that, but we need to know the Government's plan. I hope the Minister will be able to tell us about that today.

However, 700 dentists will not fill the gap. Just last week, I was speaking to Ukrainians who have come to the UK. They want to work, they want to put their skills into practice and they want to have fast-track English language training so that they are competent in terms of their language skills. They want to see their qualifications passported, so that they can get to work and practise their profession. They do not want to deskill or de-professionalise. They want to learn the clinical language that they will require, and therefore to shadow dentists getting ready for practice. However, I have not seen a strategy from the Government on how we will work with refugees who have those skills and can put them to work. Perhaps the Minister will share that in her closing remarks, because it seems such a waste of talent when many refugees absolutely want to address that local need but cannot do so.

I turn now to the future training of dentists—a point raised by the hon. Member for St Ives. I have had discussions with Hull York Medical School, which is a fabulous partnership between the two cities, and it would be prepared to help support a dental school. Of course, that would need investment, so we need proper investment for the future. To look at how that would work, I spoke to the commissioners, and there certainly is an appetite in our city to host such a school in the future. That would be helpful in bringing dentists onstream, but we also must recognise that students currently in training are struggling to get placements in the NHS. Of course, the more dentists who leave, the harder it will be to train the current cohort. Unless we see a quick increase in the number of NHS dentists, we will be in even more difficulty. That is why the urgency is there now. We must build back an NHS service for the future to ensure that we have those professionals in place.

Finally, we know that integrated care systems will be taking over the commissioning of dental services next year. My concern is that Government are waiting for that moment to act. We must see action now, because the integrated care systems will not be able to solve a problem that the national Government won't.

2.57 pm

**Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and to follow the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell). I am pleased to report that my own dentist is in the hon. Lady's constituency, and I have had excellent service from them for the past 25 years.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on securing the debate. As we have heard, many Members across the House have had significant correspondence on this issue from constituents. Since the start of the year, I have been contacted by 26 constituents raising their difficulties in obtaining access to NHS dentistry. I therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss this important issue.

The problem of access to NHS dental services has sometimes been put down to a lack of adequate staff numbers. Across the Tees Valley CCG area over the last

11 years, the number of dentists carrying out NHS activity has remained static, at around 330. Moreover, issues with access to care have undoubtedly been compounded by the pandemic, with waiting times increasing significantly due to the infection control measures that were required to keep services going. However, those are not the main issues.

Instead, we must look at the shortcomings in the current system of dental contracts, which was introduced by Labour in 2006. Under that system, a dental provider agrees to provide a set number of units of dental activity from April until the following March, and the annual contract value is paid in 12 monthly instalments. Those units are not related to numbers of patients or the extent of the work that needs to be performed, and similar rates are paid for taking out one tooth or doing one filling and for doing extensive dental work.

Therefore, dental providers effectively end up being paid less money for more work, with it not being financially viable to provide NHS dental services. That results in providers not taking on NHS patients, or sometimes handing back NHS contracts and concentrating on private dental care. Furthermore, the nature of the employment of many associates—who are retained on a decreasing percentage share of the income they generate—further reduces the incentive for those coming up through the profession to remain doing NHS work. I understand from the Minister that the British Dental Association and NHS England are in discussions to reform the contract. I wish those negotiations well for the sake of all our constituents.

I would also like to focus on the fact that the main causes of tooth loss are decay and gum disease. Prevention is definitely better than cure. Improved dental hygiene gives a better chance of keeping teeth for life. I hope that any changes to the NHS contract include a shift to focus more on prevention and pre-emptive care in order to reduce demand for routine and urgent dental care.

I firmly believe we need a far greater focus on education in dental care. Early years foundation stage is a child's first experience with oral health impacting on the rest of their life. Setting good dental hygiene standards and practices early on often leads to far less need for care in later life. Schools should do more to emphasise good dental health, and dentists should do more to educate parents on how they can set high standards for their children and on the vital role they play in normalising dental visits, putting their children at ease with the dentist, as a person they can trust.

I welcome the steps the Government have taken to try to deal with the backlog of NHS dental care, including the provision of £50 million to provide up to 350,000 additional dental appointments in England. It is welcome that that funding was targeted at those groups most in need of dental treatment, with children and people with learning disabilities, autism or severe mental health problems being prioritised. But I fear that that is not enough to ensure that everyone who needs to be seen can be.

This is a hugely important issue in Darlington, and one we cannot afford to get wrong. It is essential that those in the most need of care and those in the most deprived areas are prioritised. The current system is simply not working in that regard. I trust that the Minister has listened closely to the points I have raised, and recognises the importance of expediting the reform of NHS dentistry contracts and of focusing on preventive care, so that we can create a system that works for all.

3.2 pm

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Stringer. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) for the way he introduced the debate and covered so much of the ground we need to pay attention to.

This is a funny old place. We wait for months to talk about dentistry, and now we have had two debates in two days. I spoke in yesterday's debate and I do not want to repeat the points I made then, but I do want to develop some of them. We clearly face an extraordinary crisis in dentistry. It was fascinating to see all the Members intervening on the hon. Member for St Ives, telling their stories about constituents who had contacted them, unable to access NHS dentistry. We had that yesterday throughout the debate, with some horrific stories about the self-treatment that some people have been driven to carrying out with pliers. That emphasises the scale of the crisis across the country.

If we had all hung about after Prime Minister's questions, and the Speaker had asked, "Has anybody here not had a constituent contact them about access to NHS dentistry?" no hands would have gone up. We all face this problem. I met our local dental committee last week. I said yesterday that, in response to that meeting, it commissioned a survey across the city, speaking to about half the practices. Only one could offer a waiting time shorter than a year. For 29%, it was up to two years; for 32% it was more than two years. The biggest number—35%—said, "At this moment, we simply can't take anybody on to the waiting list."

It is a shocking situation that we find ourselves in. I will not repeat everything I said yesterday, but I cited the example of a pregnant constituent who wrote to me. She said:

"I have a MATB1 form entitling me to free dental care whilst I'm pregnant and for a year after birth. Unfortunately, I can't use this as I can't find an NHS dentist".

There is a reason why pregnant women are given access to free dentistry: they face particular problems with oral health during pregnancy, which will give rise to long-term problems unless they are addressed. We know, too, that unless people get the dental service they need when they need it, that creates all sorts of other long-term health problems that are not only hugely damaging to them individually, but ultimately costly to the NHS. Not getting the money in the right place at the right time just causes more problems for budgets further down the road.

The most shocking part—I am overusing that word, but perhaps it is appropriate—of the contributions we heard yesterday was about children. The No. 1 cause of child admissions to hospital is rotting teeth, which arise from the failure to get children dental treatment when they need it. The hon. Member for St Ives made a really good point about our lack of ambition, which is a point we can make about successive Governments. The fact is that we do not have the ambition for NHS dentistry to cover the entire population, in the way we would expect for all other aspects of health provision—even if we do not always get that provision right. We need to have a fundamental debate about dentistry.

There are two ways of addressing the problem, which Members have alluded to. One is the contract. Yes, the contract was introduced by a Labour Government in 2006—let's be honest—and it became fairly clear



[Paul Blomfield]

fairly soon that it was not working. In 2008, the Health Committee described it as not fit for purpose. Alan Johnson, who was then Health Secretary, commissioned the Steele inquiry, which reported in 2009. In 2010, we committed to reform the contract, and the Conservative Government made the same commitment, so this issue is cross-party and involves successive Governments, and we need to sort it out.

When I was going through the problems in the contract yesterday, I was pleased that the Minister nodded at each point I made. I would be grateful if, in her summation today, she could give us an insight into the contract reform that the Government are looking at, because we do not simply want to see tinkering, a little bit of shifting here and there, or—as I said yesterday—tweaking at the edges. Since the Health Committee reported in 2008, the contract has needed fundamental reform. Yesterday, I said that it was wrong that the contract was based on units of dental activity using figures from the two years previous to 2006, which are now massively outdated, and the Minister nodded. I said that it contains huge discrepancies in remuneration rates between practices doing the same work, and she nodded. I said—this was particularly relevant during covid—that the contract provides penalties, through financial clawback, for underperformance and not achieving targets, even if the reasons for non-achievement are completely beyond the control of practitioners, such as an inability to fill a job or the infection protection measures that were put in place. However, there is no reward if a dental practice overperforms—if it sees more people or deals with more teeth. The Minister nodded at that one, too.

The contract limits how much NHS treatment a practice can provide because of the quotas and the way that providers are contractually obliged to spread their NHS work and not be responsive to demand as and when it arises—the Minister nodded at that point, too. I would be grateful if she confirmed in her summation that the Government intend to address all those points, and indeed others, in reforming the contract.

The second aspect is the lack of funding for dentistry, which has fallen further than in any other part of the NHS. We should all recognise that it is a Cinderella service in the NHS. According to the BDA, funding for NHS dentistry has fallen by 25% since 2010, which, as I say, is completely out of line with the rest of the NHS. Alongside reforming the contract—we do not simply want a sleight of hand in solving these issues—what do the Government intend to do on funding? We heard about the £50 million Government investment for emergency funding as a result of covid, but there were problems with that—I say that with respect to the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson), who raised it in our debate yesterday. It was time-restricted funding for one quarter and was offered in a very short timeframe, which made it difficult to implement and involved work in addition to the contract. Practices were told that if they tried to help and then did not meet their standard contract target as a result, they would face financial penalties.

Unnecessary restrictions were imposed on the emergency funding by some commissioning teams—for example, in Sheffield, it had to be for out-of-hours access. The

Minister is shaking her head. That might not have been what was required by the Government, but it was required by many commissioning teams. The net result was that lots of that money was not drawn down. I asked the Secretary of State yesterday to indicate how successful the initiative had been by telling us how much money had been drawn down, and he was not able to. I hope that officials have been able to provide the Minister with that number today, so that she can give us an indication of the success of that initiative.

I will say no more now because I am conscious that other Members want to speak, and we should all share our experiences from across the country, but I hope that we will not kick the issue down the road again and that the Minister, in her winding-up remarks, will commit to a comprehensive statement on where the Government intend to move on contract reform and funding to solve the crisis. If they do not make a statement before the summer and if we do not take action urgently, we will really be seeing the potential death of NHS dentistry.

3.13 pm

**Anthony Mangnall** (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I will be very brief because many points have already been made, but I want to try and give a further south-west example of the problems that we face, particularly in rural and coastal communities. The problem is sizeable and the requirement to respond to it is urgent. As has been said by so many colleagues from across the House, we must grip the issue now. If we let it slide, it will get worse and worse, and the backlog will get bigger and bigger.

The hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) was right to say that, like buses, it is good to have two debates on this. I was sorry not to be able to make my comments known yesterday. I was particularly struck by some of the positive developments that have come out of the Department, most notably that urgent care is back to pre-pandemic levels. There are also 700 centres for urgent care, £50 million has been made available to encourage 350,000 extra appointments, and there is an urge and a push to upskill dental nurses, assistants and technicians. Those are all very welcome steps.

I do not mean to be critical of the Government, because the Minister, who has responded to my letters, has spoken to me at length on the issues that we face in south Devon. There are a few outstanding issues that I hope she might be able to take on board. I hope she might also be willing to listen to some of the suggestions that colleagues and I are making.

One of the five areas where I see a significant problem, which has already been raised, is children not getting access to dentists. On pensioners, countless constituents have contacted me who cannot get access to the very necessary dentistry services that they require. We must find a way to address that, for children and pensioners alike. We can find a way through this. The problem in my patch is that dentists are not taking on new patients. In fact, to give a concentrated example, there is one practice within 15 miles of Totnes that is accepting patients, and in that instance it is only children. I understand that the practice is already oversubscribed and therefore unable to see people in a reasonable timeframe. This is a real problem that, as others have said, is becoming exacerbated as time goes by.

My next point is about urgent dental care centres. I have heard about 700 of them being set up across the country, but I am not aware of one that is dealing with my constituents. In fact, when people use the hotline to even contact the NHS to discuss it, they cannot get through. I have constituents in considerable pain contacting the helpline and not being able to even get through to convey their point. That needs to be addressed. It is bad enough not being able to see a dentist; it is perhaps even worse not being able to talk to someone about the help one needs. It is also reflected in why we see so many people ending up in A&E with problems with their teeth. Addressing this issue would help the A&E numbers.

The Minister, as ever, is assiduous in responding to our correspondence. I hope she will not take this the wrong way, but she responded to one of my letters that it may be helpful to know that patients are registered with a dental practice only for the course of their treatment, meaning there are no geographical restrictions on which practice a patient may attend. She has been to south Devon, I am sure. If she has not, she is very welcome—it could not be a better time to visit over the summer. Our geography is very difficult at the best of times. We do not have rail lines—they were all ripped up in the 1950s. Our bus services have been cut back. There are no major routes even between the major towns in my constituency and the hospitals—I think of Dartmouth and Kingsbridge.

If we do not have the transport system to help people to get to those practices, the geography matters a great deal. We need to focus on a response for the rural and coastal communities, because they are at a significant disadvantage, as my right hon. Friends the Members for Ashford (Damian Green) and for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) said.

The £50 million made available is welcome, but the percentage awarded to the south-west is 9%, which, if my maths is good enough—probably not as good as my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas)—is £4,762,000. That will not be enough to deal with the sizeable issues in what is classed as the south-west, which is Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall.

I said I would not speak for long, but I have a few points that I hope the Minister will take on board. I hope we can find a solution on the basis of cross-party consensus and co-operation and of the urgent need to address this issue. Evidently, we need more dentists. There is no doubt about that. Training takes time. It is great that we are looking at how to retrain people, but what steps are we taking to encourage the creation and set-up of dentist schools across the country?

People want to train and work in this country. The NHS is a draw to medical students around the world. We should be able to train them here and encourage them to work in our system, at least for a certain amount of time. What steps are being taken to recognise the equivalent level of qualification that might be found in other countries to encourage them to come to this country?

I have mentioned it three times, but for added effect I will make the point again: we need a robust response for rural and coastal areas. Is the Minister willing to meet all coastal and rural MPs, on a cross-party basis, who have an issue with dentistry to discuss this issue? It is significant that, from Cornwall to elsewhere in the country, we all make similar points about how we are disadvantaged.

That is no disrespect to the hon. Members for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and for Sheffield Central, but I hope the Minister will take that on board, because it is becoming more urgent.

Contract renegotiation has already been mentioned. We need more details on that, and it has to be sped up. Nobody wants us to sit here pointing the finger—I accept that Labour brought in this terrible decision in 2006; there we are, I have pointed it—but what we want is a solution. We can find a solution. If yesterday's debate and this debate are anything to go by, there are sensible options being put forward. The time to act is now. Too many people have been in significant pain for too long.

3.20 pm

**Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. In the last few months, I have received dozens of letters and emails from constituents about their difficulties in securing NHS dentistry, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) for securing this important debate.

A key part of levelling up is ensuring that health inequalities are addressed and that people's access to vital dental treatment is not based on a postcode lottery. Only yesterday, I received an email from a constituent, Kayleigh. She was told by her dentist that she and her family would no longer be able to access routine NHS appointments. Kayleigh did exactly the right thing and called up other dentists in Blackpool and all along the Fylde coast, but time after time, the response she received was the same: "We are not taking on NHS patients, there is no waiting list, and there is no intention whatsoever to change that in the near future."

Kayleigh works part time to help to support her young family, but private dental appointments are completely unaffordable and totally out of the question. She is one of thousands of my constituents in Blackpool who do not or cannot access NHS dentistry. It is difficult to establish a figure for how many of my constituents do not have an NHS dentist, but it is likely to be in excess of 10,000, or at least one in five adults.

The problems that our constituents are reporting to us are not being caused just by a lack of trained dentists. The number of dentists registered to provide care with the General Dental Council is actually at a record high, having increased by 2,000 since the start of the pandemic. The problems are being caused by two main issues, the first of which is the massive impact of the pandemic on dentistry.

The BDA estimates that more than 43 million dental appointments—more than a year's-worth of dentistry in pre-covid times—has been lost due to the pandemic. There are of course steps that the Government could take to relieve that backlog, such as training more dentists or making it easier to bring in accredited foreign dentists to work in this country. I know that the Government are investigating these possible solutions, and the Minister has stated that legislation may be brought forward at the end of this year to address those points.

The second major issue is dentists opting to carry out more private dental work than NHS care. Nine out of 10 dental practices with significant NHS commitments report problems recruiting staff. When I was on a recent visit to a dental practice in Blackpool, the owners stressed

[Scott Benton]

the difficulty they have in recruiting and retaining trained dentists. This is a particularly acute problem for many coastal communities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) just mentioned, and exacerbates the challenges we have in providing NHS appointments in particularly deprived coastal communities.

The number of registered dentists is increasing, but many are now taking on a higher proportion of work in the private sector, and around 3,000 dentists in England have stopped providing NHS treatment altogether. There is not a shortage of dentists, rather a shortage of dentists motivated to take on NHS work. One example is Ivory Dental Care in my constituency, which recently wrote to patients informing them that from July it will no longer be offering NHS dentistry. That will result in an additional 2,000 Blackpool residents no longer being registered with an NHS dentist.

I am pleased that the Minister recently stated that an announcement on reforming the NHS dental contractual framework will be made soon, with the aim of paying dentists more fairly for their work. This is a vital step to stop a steady stream of NHS dentists leaving for more profitable, private work. It should also address the issues with low morale among dentists and turn the tide, so that the NHS is a more attractive place for them to work.

I know that this Government are serious about tackling health inequalities. It is appalling that children from the most deprived areas are already three times more likely to have hospital extractions, and oral cancers are obviously less likely to be spotted among those who have fewer routine dental appointments. We simply cannot allow such health inequalities in dental care to persist. One of the reasons I was elected to this House was because of the Government's pledge to increase spending on our NHS, with the help of the budget rising from £133 billion at the start of this Parliament to £177 billion by the end of it. To that end, I welcome the additional £50 million that the Government made available for providing dental services earlier this year, but the reality is that this is actually falling in comparison with the overall health budget. We cannot put at risk the Government's plans to level up the nation's health by letting this continue. Dental health should be considered on an equal footing to the rest of our healthcare, so that we can further improve on the solid progress being made in towns such as Blackpool to reduce health inequalities.

3.26 pm

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on securing the debate. Access to NHS dentistry remains an enormous problem right across England, from his constituency, which is the most westerly, to the Waveney constituency that I represent, which is the most easterly. There is not only a so-called perfect storm, but also a perfect symmetry, which hits the most vulnerable hardest.

The Government have brought in measures to address this crisis, which have had some partial success; but what is needed is a long-term strategic plan for NHS dentistry, which I would suggest should meet the following criteria. First, a secure long-term funding stream. Secondly,

a strategic approach to recruitment and retention. Thirdly, replacement of the dysfunctional NHS dental contract. Fourthly, a prevention policy, promoting personal oral healthcare. And fifthly and finally, transparency and full accountability, through the new emerging integrated care systems.

The issue on which I wish to focus falls in the last of those categories. It is the procurement of NHS dentistry, which at present is opaque and has, over a long period, led to some outcomes that are not in the best interests of local residents and do not meet the standards of probity that one is entitled to expect in the award of public contracts.

In 2009, the late Dr David Johnson, a much-loved local dentist with a thriving practice in the high street of Lowestoft, was refused a contract to continue to offer a service that he had provided to the local community for many years. That happened in highly unsatisfactory circumstances, which caused much personal upset and ultimately led to units of dental activity being taken away from Lowestoft, where they were much needed, and reallocated elsewhere.

More recently, approximately two years ago, a contract was awarded for the out-of-hours service in Norfolk. The company that won the contract still does not have either regular dentists or premises, and does not work anywhere near the hours stipulated in the contract.

**Dr Poulter:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right when he speaks of the challenges that patients face throughout Suffolk in accessing NHS dentistry. Does he agree that there is availability of emergency out-of-hours dentistry, but that some companies are not taking the correct steps to provide it—and that some dentists are not opening up the number of slots that they are contractually obliged to, to provide it?

**Peter Aldous:** I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for that intervention. He is correct, and the example I have just provided illustrates that point.

On the issues with the probity of procurement arrangements, I will move forward to the present. It is welcome that a new, long-term NHS dentistry contract has been awarded for the Lowestoft area, and the locally based Dental Design Studio will deliver the contract to a high standard for the benefit of local people. However, before DDS was awarded the contract, it was initially won by a limited company with no local presence, no dentists and no premises. That company then offered the contract to local practices, seeking bids, initially of £400,000, which it then reduced to £250,000. When it was unable to sell on the contract, it withdrew from the process.

Procurement arrangements that allow such blatant profiteering are quite clearly not fit for purpose. There is also a worry that the process is skewed against partnerships, which have been the traditional means of providing primary healthcare in local communities. Only single legal entities and limited companies are able to tender for NHS dental contracts, with partnerships excluded from doing so. The feedback that I am receiving is that the tender documents are far from straightforward and discourage some local NHS dentists who remain in practice from bidding for contracts.



The transfer of responsibility from NHS England to the new integrated care systems, which will start operating in just over a week's time, provides an opportunity to carry out root-and-branch reform of the procurement and oversight arrangements for NHS dentistry. We need to ensure that they are fair, transparent and in the best interests of local people. It is vital that we seize this opportunity.

3.31 pm

**Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) for securing this important debate and praise hon. Members for their powerful contributions, which contained a lot of personal experiences setting out just how dire the situation is across the country.

Here we are again. The problem with NHS dentistry has come up time and again over recent months. No matter how much the Minister wants to bury her head in the sand, issues with access to NHS dentistry are just not going away. The situation is a national scandal, as recognised by Members from across the House, by the sector and by our constituents, whose heartbreaking cases continue to fill our postbags. One cannot help but feel emotional at the immense pain people are having to live with.

Shamefully, we know that children are particularly badly affected. Half of all children in England have no access to an NHS dentist, with 78 children under 11 going to A&E every single day for a tooth extraction. The hon. Member for St Ives described a family with three children, none of whom had ever seen a dentist, with one child only seen because they had to go to A&E. In Wakefield, a fifth of children suffer from tooth decay before the age of three. This is not just unacceptable; it is a downright disgrace.

In yesterday's debate, the Minister held her hands up and recognised the problem in primary care. Frankly, I was delighted to finally hear something akin to humility from the Minister on access to NHS dentistry. However, just as it seemed we would make some meaningful progress, the same old script was rolled out and the blame was laid at the door of the Labour party. I put it to the Minister yesterday, and do so again today, that her party has been in government for 12 years. When Labour was in government and saw that the contract was not working, we committed to reforming it, as set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), and put that in our 2010 manifesto, just as this Government did in theirs.

**Anthony Mangnall:** How does the hon. Lady explain the Labour performance in Wales, where dental practices are going down and the system is not being addressed? It is clear that the Labour party has no suggestions.

**Feryal Clark:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. If he wants to know about Labour's performance on the NHS, he should look at the performance of the Labour Government between 1997 and 2010. Waiting times went from 18 months to 18 weeks.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Feryal Clark:** I will make progress because I have a lot to say in only five minutes.

Here we are again. After more than a decade in power, the Conservative party has absolutely nothing to show for it, other than a record of complete and utter failure. The Tory Government made a commitment to reforming the contracts in their 2010 and 2017 manifestos, so I would be fascinated—as, I am sure, would other hon. Members—to hear from the Minister what on earth has been happening for the past 12 years. If she is happy to associate herself with that record, that is her decision, but I would be embarrassed and ashamed, to be frank.

The Minister is presiding over a national scandal. It is simply not good enough to keep shirking responsibility. Whenever the Government have had something that looks like a plan, it has been woefully inadequate. I am sure that the Minister will—as other Members have—tell us about the £50 million of extra funding that we have heard so much about, but if she thinks that it has made a blind bit of difference, she is very much mistaken. I have been made aware that Yorkshire and the Humber, for which £8.3 million was allocated, drew down just £2.3 million. Barely any of that money was used by general dentists; it was used predominantly by hospitals.

I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm or deny whether yesterday, after being asked about this matter by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central, her answer was simply that we should wait for the data. At best, we have had a mixed response on when we will receive the full breakdown of how much of that £50 million was taken up. Can she confirm whether we will receive that data before the summer recess?

If that funding was designed to regain the confidence of dentists and encourage them to increase their NHS activity, it has completely and utterly failed. Across England, the number of patients being seen by an NHS dentist actually dropped by 22% overall between March and April. As the Minister will be aware—I mentioned this yesterday—there was a 34% drop in her own constituency. I ask her again: how can she expect dentists across England to have confidence in her when it is clear that she does not even have the confidence of dentists in her own patch?

One way of building trust would be to communicate with the profession. Yet just eight days before the start of the next quarter, dentists have no idea of the targets that they will be working to. Can the Minister confirm whether that announcement will be left until the eleventh hour once again? Furthermore, can she confirm that, as the Secretary of State said yesterday, the target will be 100% of pre-pandemic activity?

Let me remind colleagues of a story that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) told in yesterday's debate. A constituent of hers came to her surgery and placed on her desk the teeth that he had pulled out of his own mouth with pliers. Does the Minister think that such stories, which are now disturbingly common, are acceptable in 21st century Britain?

I am sure that the Minister will say once again that the Labour party is just shouting from the sidelines and does not have any plans, but when it comes to NHS dentistry, her Government have nothing to show for their 12 years of shouting from the centre circle. "Shouting" is a generous description, in the light of the Minister's refusal even to speak to dentists at the Association of Dental Groups conference just a few weeks ago.

[Feryal Clark]

This Government might have a track record of failure, but it does not need to be that way. It is time for meaningful action that will make a difference to patients. I look forward to hearing the Minister's answers.

**Graham Stringer (in the Chair):** We are not short of time, but will the Minister leave a minute or two at the end of her speech for the mover of the motion to wind up?

3.40 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) for securing this important debate—even if it is two days in a row that we have highlighted some of these issues. I thank hon. Members on both sides for speaking on the matter.

I am slightly disappointed in the response of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Enfield North (Feryal Clark). In yesterday's debate, it was acknowledged that in all four nations, no matter who is in charge—whether it is the Labour Government in Wales, the SNP in Scotland, or in Northern Ireland, where the Assembly is still being formed after the election—there are exactly the same problems. In my speech yesterday I made reference to the fact that in Labour-run Wales there has been a 71% reduction in dental activity in the last year. The shadow Minister spectacularly failed to answer the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) on that very point.

It is important to recognise that, yes, there have been problems since before covid, but covid has dramatically impacted—

**Feryal Clark:** Here we go.

**Maria Caulfield:** The hon. Lady says, "Here we go," but it is important to recognise that for two years there were no routine appointments available due to infection control measures. We are now back up to 95% of activity, but the backlog that existed before is significantly larger than it was.

It is also important to recognise that the nub of the problem around covid has been the dental contract. The shadow Minister may not have heard what I said yesterday, but we have been negotiating a new contract with the BDA; we started those negotiations on 24 March, a final offer went to the BDA on 20 May, and we are awaiting its response. We have been in negotiations; we have not just been waiting for the work to be done. We expect to make an announcement before the summer recess—I said that both at oral questions last week and in the debate yesterday. We will be making an announcement in the coming weeks on those contract reforms.

**Paul Blomfield:** It is helpful that the Minister has given us that information about the offer made to the BDA. Can she confirm that the offer addresses the four points I asked her about on flaws in the contract? I raised those points in the debate yesterday, and they reflect concerns across the House. Is it the sort of fundamental reform of the contract that will stop dentists being driven out of the NHS and into private practice?

**Maria Caulfield:** I obviously cannot comment while there are live negotiations ongoing, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, but the offer will drive some reforms in respect of the issues raised by a number of colleagues around fair payment for dentists' level of activity. It will also look at the whole dental team and not just dentists. We have looked into whether we need legislation to be able to upskill dental technicians and dental nurses, for example, and we do not, so we are able to make progress on some of those areas, reward them for the work that they are doing and enable them to take on more work. A number of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised will be covered by that.

The hon. Member for Enfield North may not know this, but before the latest round of negotiations, there had been a number of pilot studies over the last few years looking at completely reforming the UDA model and moving to a capitation model. Those pilot studies unfortunately did not produce the results we were hoping for. They did not increase access for patients, they did not reduce inequalities and they did not point to a sustainable model, so we did not go forward with that model. That is why we started new negotiations earlier this year on reform.

It is wrong of the shadow Minister to say that nothing has been done over the last 12 years. We had two years of covid where there was no routine dental activity; only urgent appointments were undertaken. Before that, there were three years of pilot studies on the capitation model; those were not successful, which is why we have not driven forward those changes. It is important that when we introduce changes, they address the fundamental issues that have been raised in this afternoon's debate.

**Paul Blomfield:** Could I press the Minister in particular on the point that I made on financial clawback? It has been made clear to many of us who have talked to dentists that one of the most demotivating factors in the current contract is that while they are not rewarded for additional performance with NHS patients, they face clawback if they underperform, including for reasons that are completely beyond their control. I understand that for the last quarter that is currently being considered, 57% of dentists are going to face financial penalties. Those are the sorts of issues that are tipping them out of NHS dentistry. Will that issue be addressed?

**Maria Caulfield:** We are looking at the issue of clawback. Obviously we are in negotiations, so I cannot say what the final outcome will be. However, on the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about clawback during the last quarter, when the omicron variant was a particularly significant factor, we made clear to commissioners and dentists that if there were issues arising from omicron—patients who could not attend their appointments, or dental teams that were unable to be at work—they would not be subject to clawback. I would be disappointed if dentists who could not undertake their units of dental activity for covid-related reasons were penalised with clawback for that, because we made it very clear that there needed to be a flexible mechanism to mitigate some of those issues. If the hon. Gentleman has examples of that, I would be happy to take them away and ask officials to look into them.

**Peter Aldous:** There is some ambiguity about where the negotiations stand. Can my hon. Friend clarify whether a letter has gone to the BDA to start the

negotiation process, or whether there are finalised heads of terms ahead of an announcement on a new contract?

**Maria Caulfield:** The negotiations started back in March and there have been a number of meetings with the BDA. The BDA has been sent final recommendations, but we have not yet heard back, so I encourage the BDA to respond.

I will touch on a number of other issues that have been raised, the first of which is overseas dentists. For obvious reasons, no overseas registration examinations took place during the pandemic, creating a backlog of over 800 overseas dentists waiting to take their exams. Exams restarted earlier this year, and extra sessions are being held to get through that backlog of dentists so that we can get them into the system and working as dentists as quickly as possible.

We have also been working with the General Dental Council, which is the regulator, on recognition of overseas qualifications. The GDC did a consultation on regulation and recognition of overseas dentists, which I think closed on 5 or 6 May. We are waiting to hear the feedback from that consultation, but we are happy to lay regulations in this place—if necessary, we can do so by the end of the year—to give the GDC the power to mutually recognise overseas dentists according to its judgment. It is not for the Government to mutually recognise qualifications; it is for the regulator. However, we are happy to give the GDC the power to do so, and we look forward to its feedback on the consultation it undertook, because our overseas dentists are a rich source of the talent and skill that we need.

When it comes to getting more dentists into certain parts of the country—obviously, one of those areas is the south-west, whether that is Cornwall, Devon or Plymouth—significant work is going on. I met with Health Education England this morning to look at how we can set up centres for dental development. Those centres are different from dental schools, which are often very expensive and take a long time to set up, and, as was said during the debate, there are not always dentists available locally to supervise the training. Centres for dental development can be much more flexible and meet existing local needs while also looking at what needs could develop.

As such, we will be working up a programme, looking at what we can do in those specific parts of the country with the greatest need. In Norfolk, I recently met a group of local MPs and representatives from the local university and the local enterprise partnerships, all of whom are willing to work together to make that happen. I am going to Portsmouth on Monday, to Gosport, to see exactly the same thing—dentists coming together to come up with local solutions that will make a difference.

**Anthony Mangnall:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, and I thank her for those words. Far from burying her head in the sand, she is putting her head above the parapet. That is most welcome. As mentioned by my right hon. Friends the Members for Ashford (Damian Green) and for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), there is clearly significant data that highlights the worst affected areas. Given that the data is there, could we expedite that roundtable meeting as quickly as possible?

**Maria Caulfield:** I am very happy to meet MPs. Once we get through the contract announcements before the end of recess, it has to be a priority to look at how we increase the number of dentists in specific parts of the country, whether in York or in coastal or rural areas. I am very willing to do that. Many parts of the country do have enough dentists, but they do not want to take on NHS work, so we are also going to look at the procurement and commissioning of services. That is where the ICSs will come into their own. At last, local commissioners will be accountable for commissioning dental work. There is no ring-fenced budget for dentistry. We spend about £3 billion a year and the work can be commissioned at a local level. The problem up until now is that no one has taken responsibility for that, so the ICSs will be a key change to make that happen.

**Dr Poulter:** I want to clarify one point. Does my hon. Friend anticipate the new dental contract being a sticking plaster, or does she think that it is here to stay that it will put right these challenges?

There is a real problem with the commissioning of dental services. I am afraid that I do not have faith that ICSs will be a panacea to sort things out, because local CCGs, some of which were not good commissioners of a number of services, have simply been cut and pasted into the same posts on the ICSs. Will my hon. Friend reassure me that she will personally look at the commissioning process and hold those commissioners to account, to ensure that they deliver proper dental services?

**Maria Caulfield:** Absolutely. The whole point of the ICSs is that the commissioning service has not worked up until now. Some commissioners are very good at commissioning dental services, while others do not have anyone with dental experience on their boards and are not so good. ICSs will be accountable, which is the difference from what we have now. I will meet ICSs to ensure that they understand the responsibilities.

**Rachael Maskell** *rose—*

**Maria Caulfield:** I will take one last intervention, because I am conscious of the time.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. When I wrote to her, she kindly replied and said that York could well be one of the areas for a centre of dental development. I would like to know the timescale for such considerations, and what progress has been made since our correspondence.

**Maria Caulfield:** I met Health Education England this morning and we are working through that system. I will be able to update the hon. Lady shortly, because I am keen that we make progress.

A number of Members mentioned prevention. The Health and Care Act 2022 includes provisions relating to fluoridation as standard, and we are working to make progress since it became law recently. We are also working with education colleagues on supervised toothbrushing. As we speak, some of the 75 family hubs that are being set up in the most deprived parts of the country as part of the Start4Life programme are looking at initiatives such as supervised toothbrushing.



[*Maria Caulfield*]

Where it is not happening at home or where parents need more support, we are ensuring that children are getting that toothbrushing experience.

On the subject of upskilling dental teams, this is about more than just dentists. My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) made the key point that it is about the whole team. At the moment, part of the contract means that only dentists can do certain work. We need to change that. Centres for dental development will be about not just training dentists but upskilling whole teams.

I hope that I have reassured Members from across the House that we are taking this issue extremely seriously. To answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives, the contract changes that we are going to announce will not be the end of it, because there is more reform that we need to do. The Secretary of State is looking at a wider piece of work to provide a long-term, sustainable solution. We are happy to work with the other three nations if they have suggestions and solutions. We are not precious about sharing best practice.

I say to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Enfield North, that it would be good if she could come to a dental debate with some suggestions and solutions, rather than constantly criticising. We are determined to solve this issue and I appreciate the urgency that every single one of my colleagues has expressed today.

**Rachael Maskell:** I raised the issue of Ukrainian refugees. The Minister seemed to indicate that she had a response, so could she provide it before she closes?

**Maria Caulfield:** The response is that every overseas dentist, apart from those in the European economic area, currently has to take the overseas registration

exam, and that is without exception. That is the work that we are trying to do with the General Dental Council. We are enabling those from Ukraine or Afghanistan, or any refugee from any country, to take part in that process. I am very keen to see mutual recognition with some countries. We are working on that and will enable the legislation to make it happen, but it will be for the regulator to decide; it is not a Government decision.

I hope that I have reassured colleagues that we are on this and appreciate the urgency. I have no doubt that we will return to this Chamber to debate this matter further in the coming weeks and months.

3.55 pm

**Derek Thomas:** First, I thank and commend the Minister for her response and for the way in which she has engaged with this subject since taking up her role. I have found her determination to get this matter right really refreshing, because this has been a long battle.

I thank all colleagues, from all parties, for their contributions and for going into things—not just the problem but the solution—in great detail. I will leave the shadow spokesperson, the hon. Member for Enfield North (Feryal Clark), out of that assessment, because I do not think that that came across from her at all.

I wish the Minister all success with trying to get a new NHS dental contract. We know that getting new contracts can be very tricky and fraught with problems, so I wish her the very best, on behalf of all of our constituents, who urgently need good dental care.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered NHS dentistry in England.

3.57 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Building Safety Remediation: Leaseholders

4 pm

**Graham Stringer (in the Chair):** I will call Shabana Mahmood to move the motion and I will then call the Minister to respond. There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up. That is the convention for 30-minute debates.

**Shabana Mahmood** (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the financial effects of building safety remediation on leaseholders.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I am grateful to have the opportunity to directly address the Minister on some of the ongoing financial impacts of building safety remediation—what has come to be known as the cladding scandal—on behalf of leaseholders in Birmingham, Ladywood, and all over the country.

Last week, we saw the five-year anniversary of the Grenfell disaster. It was a truly horrific tragedy that claimed the lives of 72 people. No one who saw that building aflame or the images on the news will ever forget them. It has left a mark on not just those affected but the whole country. The inquiry into that disaster is ongoing. I have a real concern that it may prove to be one of those cases, which we have seen too many of in this country, of justice delayed being justice denied, and that, while the inquiry may result in new procedures, those responsible for the events that led to that disaster may not be held directly to account. We live in hope and I send my solidarity—I am sure everyone present will agree—to the loved ones of those who perished at Grenfell.

The impact of Grenfell has extended much further than most of us could have imagined. That tragedy has exposed a shocking litany of regulatory failures and, in my view, outright negligence, which has led, as I say, to what we now call the cladding scandal. We have gotten a little too used to calling it a scandal when we consider the huge impact it has had on my constituents and people all over our country. It has exposed huge issues in building safety. My experience has been that just as I get my head around one part of the problem, many more present themselves—I am sure that that has been the experience of the Minister and his predecessors.

The cladding scandal has cost many of my constituents their peace of mind. It has cost them financially and wiped out life savings. It has left people languishing in the stress of knowing that the building where they live, raise their family and go to sleep every night is unsafe and poses a real fire risk. It has brought many to the brink of a complete mental and physical breakdown. I have sought to support my constituents and have dealt with many of the issues they have raised with me over the many years since this scandal was revealed. We have been campaigning together ever since, along with other leaseholder action groups that have sprung up all over the country. I am particularly grateful to the UK Cladding Action Group and the Birmingham Leaseholder Action Group, as well as other groups across the country, which have relentlessly supported leaseholders. Of course, many of them are leaseholders themselves trying to press the Government to act.

The Government have passed new legislation, and I state at the outset that I recognise how much the Government have moved from their original position, and I welcome many of the changes. However, and it will not surprise the Minister to hear me say this, I do not consider the new cap, which means that some leaseholders will pay some money towards the cost of remediation, to be fair, because they have done nothing wrong. This is not, and should not be, on them—not any part of it, not even at a capped amount. They should be spared any financial contribution. I regret that there is no direct assistance in the Building Safety Act 2022 for leaseholders who have already paid towards remediation work. There is the possibility of redress through civil action but the Act does not offer any direct assistance.

Nevertheless, the main provisions of the Building Safety Act, which received Royal Assent on 28 April, come into effect next week and the landscape in respect of leaseholders will change. However, as the Minister has already heard from me and other hon. Members, getting to this point has taken far too long. The Government have resisted acting in respect of many of the issues that MPs have been raising from the outset, only to concede that space some years later.

I remember my first pieces of casework relating to the cladding scandal, when Government Ministers and officials were still distinguishing between aluminium composite material cladding and non-ACM cladding. All of us involved in trying to seek redress, including Members of Parliament from across the House and leaseholders all over the country, pointed out the unavoidable truth that non-ACM cladding was just as dangerous as ACM cladding and would have to be removed from all the buildings where it was present. Originally, the Government held their ground and maintained the distinction, but then gave ground and bowed to the inevitable acceptance that non-ACM cladding would have to be removed.

In fact, most of the topics on which the Government have had to give ground represent issues that have been campaigned on from the start by all the groups I have mentioned, and by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee as well. We have come a long way, but these five years have taken a very heavy toll.

**Mr Jonathan Lord** (Woking) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. I speak on behalf of many of my constituents in Woking, Surrey. As well as the direct costs of remediation, many leaseholders have difficulties getting insurance or face huge premiums of three, four or five times more than they would have been historically. That also brings the possibility that people cannot sell their flat if they wish to move. Is the hon. Lady looking to the Minister and to the Government for further reassurances on those financial impacts as well?

**Shabana Mahmood:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I will be coming on to the issues in relation to insurance later in my remarks. May I take this opportunity to say how refreshing and positive it has been to be able to work with Members from across the House? That has been the House at its best and I am sure that is the reason why we have been able to make so much progress in the Building Safety Act. I hope we will continue to work together on the ongoing financial impacts, and I

[Shabana Mahmood]

hope to persuade the Minister to give further necessary ground. I will come to the matters of insurance very shortly.

Many hundreds of people in my constituency have been affected and have been living with the consequences of the cladding scandal for five long years. With work having started on some of these buildings, if people are very lucky they may finally be able to live in safe buildings in about five years' time. At best, we are looking at an entire decade of normal life being wiped out for people caught up in this scandal. Even that timescale, with people losing a decade of their life, will be out of reach for many thousands of people in our country.

I want to bring some of the ongoing issues to life for Members and the Minister by using an example in my constituency: the development at Islington Gates. There are 141 flats in the development, which is now described as an orphan block. The original developer, Midlands and City Developments, went into liquidation in 2007, and Miller Construction, which built the block, was bought out by Galliford Try in 2014. The remediation works at Islington Gates come in at a total of £9 million. Some 80% of that—£7.2 million—relates to the removal of the non-ACM cladding that covers the building. The remaining 20%—£1.8 million—relates to additional defects that were discovered and revealed as a result of the scandal, including deficiencies in fire compartmentation and other measures. As per the new rules in the Building Safety Act, the £1.8 million will need to come from the developer and, through the cascade effect that the legislation envisages, could be passed on to the owner and potentially to leaseholders, up to the value of the new cap.

Let us consider the issues relating to the ongoing work for cladding remediation. The bid that Islington Gates submitted to the building safety fund for cover was accepted, but the payments came in later than anticipated, creating huge cash-flow problems that have further exacerbated the crisis for many of my constituents.

**Dr Dan Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Many developers set up ground rent payment arrangements that will be very profitable in the long term, in view of the escalation of ground rent, and they set up service companies that sit underneath the main development company. Given the huge profits that developers make from those arrangements, does she agree that we need to do more to hold the developers to account, and that although the lifting of the current cap was welcomed, it should be lifted further?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I see no reason to maintain a cap. If we have conceded the principle that leaseholders are not to blame, that developers have made a lot of money out of these developments and that there is money available for the Government to go after on behalf of taxpayers all over the country, they should do so, and they should protect leaseholders from any additional costs.

I am concerned that the building safety fund still adopts a “computer says no” approach in cases such as those of Islington Gates, where eligibility for the fund has been accepted, the works are under way and the initial payment has been made. Administrative errors can lead to delays in further payments for the works,

and that causes a huge amount of unnecessary stress. People are putting up with living in buildings that are completely covered and have no natural light. They are putting up with living inside a building site, so they have all the noise and dust of that, and the general loss of normal life and the amenities that we all have a right to expect. This work is unavoidable and necessary, but it is in everybody's interest that it takes place as quickly as possible, so leaseholders have a chance of living a normal life soon.

Every time the BSF causes an additional delay—that is completely unacceptable—if it has accepted eligibility, works are under way and the initial payment has been made, there should be an expectation that money will be got out the door as quickly as possible for all additional payments. If administrative issues need resolution, they can be dealt with after the cheque has been paid. We have already established eligibility, and it is not as though my leaseholders are going to run off with that money. There is no risk to the taxpayer. Will the Minister say something about the BSF's approach, and will he make sure it does not add to the stresses and strains that my constituents face?

In respect of non-cladding defects—£1.8 million is required to make Islington Gates safe—the Government have made it clear in statements about the legislation and in press releases on their website that they expect developers to take responsibility for any building developed by any company within their corporate group, including cases where they acquire the original developer of the building. That would mean that the £1.8 million liability for Islington Gates falls on Galliford Try, which bought Miller Construction, the original builders.

Unfortunately, Galliford Try insists that it has no obligation to pay, and none of us has been able to do anything to persuade it otherwise. My constituents have been campaigning, and I have written to Galliford Try. We have done everything that we can think of to try to persuade it that it must meet its liabilities, do the right thing and put up the money to remediate the non-cladding defects revealed at Islington Gates. I understand that in a meeting with some of my constituents, civil servants from the Minister's Department confirmed that Galliford Try is the correct entity to pursue for the cost of those remediation works.

I want to press the Minister on just what we are supposed to do now that Galliford Try refuses to pay. It denies any and all liability for the £1.8 million. Will the Minister explain the role he envisages for the Department's recovery unit, and whether the Department would front up that money and then go after Galliford Try itself? How does he see the new legislative landscape for remediation contribution orders working in respect of leaseholders such as those at Islington Gates? My view—I think it is shared by many Members across the House—is that innocent leaseholders should not have to stump up any more money and then wait for redress at some unknown point in the future. That money should be made available now from the correct company, which should hold the liability to begin with.

I turn to insurance costs, which the hon. Member for Woking (Mr Lord) mentioned. Much attention has been paid to the cost of remediation, waking watches, alarm systems, sprinklers and other measures, but it was clear to me from the start from my constituency casework that the cost of insurance was a major problem.



In my constituency, premiums jumped in buildings affected by the cladding scandal. At the Jupiter 1 development, residents saw a 1025% increase in their insurance premium, from £40,000 to £450,000. King Edwards Wharf saw their premium jump from £50,000 to £450,000. Islington Gates used to pay £36,000 and saw that jump to £320,000.

Brindley House was in the terrible position of being the first building in the whole country without insurance when it was impossible to get cover for it for a period of time. The Minister will know that placed all leaseholders, and everybody else who was connected to the building, in default of their mortgage or rental agreements. That was a terrible stress. When insurance cover was eventually obtained, it jumped from £46,000 to £322,000.

Those are shocking increases in insurance premiums. It is clear to me that the calculation of the premiums did not take into account the risk in those buildings and, in particular, the measures that leaseholders have taken to reduce risk in their buildings. In each building, hundreds of thousands of pounds has been spent on state-of-the-art alarm systems and other measures, such as waking watches, to bring down the risk of a catastrophic fire. None of that was reflected in the insurance premium. The more residents have paid for risk mitigation, the more their insurance premium has gone up. It would have made no difference whether they had done those works or not. I think that that is a total con.

I first wrote to the Financial Conduct Authority and the Government at the beginning of 2020, and it has taken two years for a little bit of investigation to be done. I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State wrote to the FCA to ask it to look into the matter, but if that had been done in 2020, we would be much further into the investigation into the behaviour of the insurance sector. I dare say that if the insurance sector had known that there would be Government-level scrutiny of the premiums, two years-worth of unjustifiable insurance hikes might not have been visited upon my constituents and people all over the country.

This problem requires much more than a slow-paced inquiry. I would like the Government to take much stronger action much more quickly so that we are not still talking about the cost of insurance premiums some years hence. The reality is that insurance companies have made money twice over out of the cladding scandal, first from the policies they used to indemnify the so-called professionals and the building industry as a whole—let us be honest, they will not be called to pay out on those policies; nobody envisages that insurers will pick up at the tab for this scandal—and, secondly, because they have gone on to charge thousands of people eye-watering sums to insure those buildings. They have given people no credit for the money they have spent making their buildings safer to live in while they wait for the final works to be completed. It is unconscionable. The Government should intervene to seek financial redress for affected constituents. If the additional cost of insurance were included in the cap brought in by the Building Safety Act 2022, many people would be much closer to that £10,000 anyway, and they would be protected from additional costs. I wonder whether the Minister might address that point and see if there is any possibility of including insurance payments within that £10,000.

The Secretary of State's letter to the Financial Conduct Authority asked for suggestions to achieve widely available and affordable cover for leaseholders. That letter should

have included some additional asks, one being that the FCA should consider redress for the insurance hikes that are taking place. It is clear to anybody from the outside who is paying attention to the effect of the cladding scandal, and making a fair assessment about its financial impact, that the insurance companies have gained excessive profits from the building safety crisis. They should be required to contribute to the remediation costs, on the basis that they covered the actions of the developers that failed to comply with building safety and have since received increased premiums as a result thereof. Nothing less will do.

We should look to the insurance companies for further assistance in covering the overall costs of remediation, which will, in the end, fall on the taxpayer in some way, shape or form, especially if more and more developers do not live up to their responsibilities. It is high time the Government added insurance companies to the list of people that they need to go after in order to recover some of the costs of this scandal. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about that.

4.20 pm

**The Minister for Housing (Stuart Andrew):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) for organising this important debate and for noting the fifth anniversary of the Grenfell disaster.

The hon. Lady has been a powerful and effective advocate for leaseholders in her constituency who, like those all over the country, have been caught up in a mess not of their making, and one that they should not be held responsible for. She is right to highlight the very human cost that people have suffered from fear of the places they live in and call home, and from worrying about whether they are safe. I thank her for continuing to hold the Government to account for our role, particularly given that we promised to strengthen our support for leaseholders and restore confidence and proportionality to the market.

I will come on to the case she raised in a moment, but I first want to emphasise that the Government are on the side of leaseholders. We are making good on that sentiment with our sweeping set of reforms to building safety, the mortgage and lending market, and building insurance—reforms that will help to put things right, with far-reaching legal and financial protections for leaseholders who have been affected by this crisis. At the same time, we are forcing building owners to step up and fix the cladding issues that, in many cases, they helped to create.

I would like to say a bit more about each of those reforms and how we are addressing the issues that the hon. Lady has raised. I thank her for writing to the Secretary of State about the issues at Islington Gates. First, I recognise—we as a Government recognise—that the situation is unjust and unfair for leaseholders living in Islington Gates.

I want to be crystal clear on where the Government stand on this kind of situation. We expect—no ifs, no buts—developers to do the right thing and take responsibility for the buildings that they have developed. Most of the industry recognises this expectation and, equally, recognises the need to do the right thing by leaseholders. That is why more than 45 developers have

[Stuart Andrew]

signed a pledge to do exactly that. As I speak today, we are turning those pledges into legally binding contracts. We would expect such contracts to cover any building developed by any company within their corporate group, including complex cases where they acquired the original developer of the building.

As hon. Members would expect, my Department will work closely with pledge signatories to agree the list of buildings covered by their pledge, and we have pushed developers in the sector to take ownership of remediation work. We have always recognised that there will be complex situations, as is the case with Islington Gates, where the water has been muddied by acquisitions, corporate restructures and other changes. I commit to the hon. Lady that we will follow up at the earliest opportunity to see whether the development of the building can be attributed to one of the pledged signatories. I assure her that I will take a very personal interest in helping her with this case.

If it cannot be attributed to one of those companies, this case will inform our thinking on which further companies should be asked to sign this pledge. I assure her that even if the developer of Islington Gates is not in the initial scope, the remediation of the unsafe cladding will be fully grant-funded. The remediation of unsafe cladding on this building is being funded through the building safety fund—£6.8 million has been allocated for this work so that leaseholders are not paying for the works to the cladding. However, I take on board the point she has raised in this debate. We must listen to and learn from the experiences that she has highlighted. I want to ensure that we understand more about the issues that have been discovered here, and ensure that the building safety fund is run efficiently. I will raise those points with my noble Friend Lord Greenhalgh.

**Shabana Mahmood:** I welcome the Minister's commitment, and I do appreciate it. I look forward to speaking to him in detail about the particular circumstances at Islington Gates. I am sure that my constituents will have heard and appreciated his recognition of the situation as unfair and unjust. Could I press him on how he sees the recovery unit working, in terms of the carrot-and-stick approaches that we might take with developers that still fail to live up to their responsibilities?

**Stuart Andrew:** The hon. Lady is right; this will probably be one of those early cases within the Act where we need to test this. That is why I am keen to work with her, so that we can ensure that officials in the Department fully understand the specific issues relating to the case, as it may well also apply to other cases, and we can roll that out further.

The hon. Lady will know that we have introduced many protections relating to non-cladding defects under the leaseholder protections within the Act. I assure her and residents of Islington Gates that no qualifying leaseholder in a building taller than 11 meters or five stories will face bills to remediate dangerous cladding, and that the bills for non-cladding remediation will, as she said, be capped at a maximum of £10,000. Those cost protections will come into force on 28 June, and

costs already paid out in the last five years, including for interim measures such as waking watch, will count towards that cap. I reiterate that we are protecting leaseholders, in law, from that date. Leaseholders no longer have to worry about being landed with excessive bills that they cannot afford.

We will not stand by and allow developers and contractors who have created these defects to get away with it. Significant new powers in the Building Safety Act will allow those who created building safety defects to be held to account. We are retrospectively extending the limitation period under the Defective Premises Act 1972 to 30 years, giving new powers to courts to remove the protection afforded by shadowy shell companies and special-purpose vehicles, and creating new powers to hold construction product manufacturers to account.

Remediation orders and remediation contribution orders will allow the first-tier tribunal to force firms to fix—and pay to fix—their buildings. We have introduced those powers so that legal action can be pursued against developers, contractors, manufacturers and freeholders. The Department's own recovery unit has been established to pursue firms who fail to do the right thing, including through the courts. Leaseholders deserve accountability from those who built the buildings and those who have owned and exploited them.

I am conscious of time, but I will quickly touch on the insurance issue, because I know that hon. Members have mentioned it. We are working tirelessly with industry to unlock that market. Where individual buildings have struggled to access cover, we have worked with industry to highlight the issues, and we have seen the British Insurance Brokers' Association place those risks through its members. I offer my full support if such help would prove to be useful to the hon. Lady's constituents.

To address the lack of affordable and adequate buildings insurance, we have been working closely with the Association of British Insurers to develop solutions, and my colleague Lord Greenhalgh met the association last month to discuss progress on an insurance pool. The Secretary of State received an initial report from the FCA on 10 May as part of its ongoing review, the findings of which will be critical to developing a full understanding of the issues in the market.

The FCA will consider all routes, whether enacted by the regulator, Government or industry, to ensure leaseholders get the value for money that they deserve. I understand the many concerns that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood has raised. We must bring proportionality back into the system, and I know that the Secretary of State takes this very seriously.

On the point that the hon. Lady made about including insurance payments in the cap, that is obviously something that I cannot commit to right now, but I will certainly take it back to the Department. However, I do take this very seriously, and we will take the recommendations very seriously. No solution is off the table when it comes to getting back to a competitive and fair insurance market for leaseholders. As I said at the beginning, I am happy to continue to work with the hon. Lady, and with other hon. Members who may have constituents affected by this, as we roll out the benefits of the Act.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Antisemitism and Other Racism in Football

4.30 pm

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered antisemitism and other forms of racism in football.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, albeit on a solemn subject. The prevalence of racism directed at footballers was brought sharply to public attention last year when Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka faced an horrific wave of abuse on social media after the Euro 2020 penalty shoot-out. Former professional footballers, such as Rio Ferdinand, Anton Ferdinand, Lianne Sanderson and Marvin Sordell have spoken movingly to Committees of the House about the torrent of hate to which they are routinely subjected via their social media accounts.

Although much good work has been done to seek to drive racism out of football, it remains a problem in the game, as it does in wider society. I want to focus today on anti-Jewish racism. I feel that does not get the attention it deserves, and that the gravity of the harm that it causes is not fully recognised. I want to pay tribute to organisations, such as Action Against Discrimination, Kick It Out, the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism, and to Lord Mann, the Government's independent adviser on antisemitism, for all the work they have done to tackle the pollution of our national game.

It would be helpful to list a few of many recent antisemitic incidents connected to football. In January 2021, a vile antisemitic comment was posted online, directed at Celtic's Israeli midfielder Nir Bitton, following a game against Rangers. In March 2021, a "Happy Passover" message, posted by Aston Villa, received a number of negative and abusive responses. Those comments were deleted, and a further statement was posted by the club, which received 27,000 dislikes. In April that year, the announcement of a proposed super league prompted an outpouring of antisemitic hate on social media, much of it directed at the owners of Chelsea, Manchester United and Spurs. Vile tropes and stereotypes were deployed, and Jews were accused of "ruining football".

In August, talkSPORT issued an apology after presenters failed to challenge a caller who used an antisemitic stereotype on air in relation to a Jewish figure in football. In November last year, three men were arrested in connection with a social media video showing West Ham fans chanting an antisemitic song towards a Jewish man on a plane. In that same month, a Chelsea supporter was jailed for posting antisemitic tweets, including photos of Auschwitz and a man performing a Nazi salute.

In January this year, an Everton supporter was found guilty of singing antisemitic chants. He was given a football banning order, preventing him from attending matches for three years. In March 2022, a clip was posted on Twitter of a group enthusiastically singing an anti-Spurs song, ending with the words, "f-ing Jew". In May, two Burnley fans were arrested on suspicion of racially aggravated public order offences, after one of them was videoed making a Nazi salute towards Tottenham supporters during a premier league game.

I am afraid time prevents me from embarking on anything like a comprehensive account of the harassment and intimidation to which Jewish people are routinely subjected at football matches. Those are just some of the more serious incidents, which have been followed up by the media and, in some cases, the police. A very long list of antisemitic episodes in football across Europe is set out in a 2021 report by Lord Mann. He was assisted in that work by 15 young people who are ambassadors for the Holocaust Educational Trust. In the introduction to that report, those young ambassadors emphasise their love of football and their determination to rid it of racism. They state,

"This report must be a catalyst for footballing authorities to recognise that antisemitism is well and truly alive both in and out of the stadium, on matchdays and online, and that consistent action must be taken."

I hope the whole House will agree with that statement.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): There is no place for antisemitism or racism in sport or society, and stronger deterrents must be in place for both clubs and fans. What does the right hon. Lady make of UEFA's commitment to review loopholes in its policies for behind-doors matches where games are supposed to be played without spectators as punishment for previous fan behaviour?

**Theresa Villiers:** I totally agree that we need much more serious consequences for racism and antisemitism where it is displayed in football grounds, and the international football associations have a real role to play in delivering that outcome.

I want to highlight some of the positive work that is underway to tackle the kinds of problems I have spoken about. For example, in January 2018, Chelsea football club announced a "Say No To Antisemitism" campaign to raise awareness and educate their players, staff, fans and the wider community about antisemitism in football. In January 2020, it became the first club to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism. In December that year, the English Premier League also adopted that definition, and many clubs followed suit. The English Football League and the Football Association did so on Holocaust Memorial Day 2021. In February 2021, Kick It Out, the game's leading anti-racism body, working with Lord Mann, prepared an action plan to combat antisemitism, which it launched at training workshops in London and Manchester.

This February saw another important development, this time at Tottenham. That brings me to the Y-word. I appreciate that it is a contested term, but there can be no doubt that it is widely viewed as offensive and racist—it is a term of abuse. Since the 1970s, I understand, it has featured in chants by Spurs supporters. The club has indicated that it was initially used as a response to a lack of action taken in relation to antisemitism directed at Spurs fans, so some supporters have historically used the word as a means of taking ownership of a term routinely used to insult the club's sizeable Jewish following. However, Jewish groups have described it as antisemitic, whatever the context. Its inclusion in Tottenham chants is therefore offensive in itself, and can also trigger antisemitic responses, with consequent harms. As such, following a review of the issue, the club stated that "it is time to move on from associating this term with our Club."



[Theresa Villiers]

It went on to say:

“The Club already refrains from engaging with any social media handle or bio that contains the Y-word and we do not permit it being printed on shirts in any official retail outlets or used in any official Club context”,

to which my response would be, “About time too.” I find it somewhat shocking that there could ever have been any question of that term appearing on shirts, or in official retail outlets.

While these various initiatives to root out antisemitism in football are very much to be welcomed, there is clearly much more to be done. The professional game needs to take this issue much more seriously than it does currently. It needs to deploy far more resources to combating antisemitism, holding those responsible for it to account, and making it clear to its supporters that antisemitism is wholly unacceptable. That must include programmes aimed at ensuring supporters understand the issue better and are made aware of the hurt and harm caused by antisemitism. Urgent action is needed to crack down on the online manifestation of football-related anti-Jewish racism.

The Football (Offences) Act 1991 made racist chanting that is

“threatening, abusive or insulting to a person”

an offence when committed within football grounds. The police need to take action when those offences are committed. They need to take antisemitic crime in the football arena much more seriously than they do at the moment, and there needs to be enforcement against this kind of behaviour online, as well. In July last year, the Government announced that football banning orders would be extended to cover racist attacks on footballers on social media, meaning online trolls could potentially be excluded from grounds for up to 10 years. The Prime Minister has called on tech companies to step up and take responsibility for what they publish.

The Online Safety Bill is now on its way through Parliament. This world-leading piece of legislation will require the big tech firms to do more to tackle harmful abuse posted on their platforms, both by preventing it in the first place and by taking it down when it appears. Under their new duty of care to users, companies will have to tackle antisemitism and racism on their platforms much more effectively than they do today. Platforms will need to have appropriate systems and processes in place to stop criminals using their services to spread hate, and they will need to respond more quickly than they do currently if someone posts racist comments, whether words, images, emojis or videos.

Companies that fail in this duty of care could face big fines of up to 10% of their global turnover. For major social media operators, that could amount to billions of pounds. I urge the Minister to ensure that the legislation is effective in combating antisemitism online. In particular, big tech companies must be required to address the risk that algorithmic recommendation tools and hashtags can amplify antisemitic and other racist content. Keeping people safe online and dealing with the torrent of hatred to which so many are subjected is one of the defining challenges of our time. The Government must rise to that challenge.

In conclusion, I have campaigned against antisemitism for many years. One of my first ever visits to this Parliament was as a student in the late 1980s, when I

attended a lobby to call for Jewish refuseniks to be permitted to leave the Soviet Union where they were subject to discrimination and injustice, and to seek to persuade the Foreign Office to raise that with the Soviet leaders. I was also one of the co-authors of the 2006 report of the all-party inquiry into antisemitism. That ground breaking piece of work led to real change, including an obligation on all police forces to collect statistics on antisemitic crime.

I took part in both the recent debates on antisemitism in the House and the two public protests in Parliament Square denouncing the incidents of anti-Jewish racism in Labour. I find it deeply disturbing that this toxic prejudice is still present in our society. It is distressing that that form of racism is directed against a community for which I have such a high regard and which plays a hugely positive role among all the other communities in the diverse constituency of Chipping Barnet, which I am very proud to represent.

Antisemitism is a poison that dates back millennia. Millions have lost their lives to that vicious hatred over the centuries, culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust and industrialised killing. Every year on Holocaust Remembrance Day we make a commitment never to forget what happened and to remain always vigilant against antisemitism and racism.

Just this afternoon, I was at a meeting of the Holocaust Memorial APPG and we heard chilling testimony from a holocaust survivor, my constituent Mala Tribich. We must extend that vigilance to the beautiful game. It is hard to think of another pastime that generates such emotion in its followers. There is a visceral connection between fans and clubs, but no emotional connection justifies racist hatred and abuse of others. Let the message go out from this House today that antisemitism has no place in English football. It will not be tolerated and those responsible for it will be brought to justice.

**Graham Stringer (in the Chair):** I intend to call the SNP spokesperson at 5.08pm in order to leave two minutes for the right hon. Lady to wind up. That leaves us with just over 20 minutes for the debate. There are five Members standing but I have been notified of three Members wishing to speak, so I hope people will respect the time and be brief. That applies to interventions as well. I call Rosie Duffield.

4.44 pm

**Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on securing this important debate. Antisemitism, like every form of racism, is ugly, aggressive and ignorant, but also often overlooked or left out completely when we discuss racism in sport. We applaud the lead taken by Lewis Hamilton, and other national sporting icons, when taking the knee to highlight racism, and the important work of groups such as Show Racism the Red Card, and Kick It Out. But rarely a mention is given to the antisemitic chants or language that are seemingly just accepted or ignored on the terraces.

Several Members here are part of the APPG against antisemitism, and are familiar with the work of Lord John Mann and our secretariat, the Antisemitism Policy Trust, who work tirelessly to highlight the problems, and work with football clubs and other institutions to

actively find solutions. Back in 2008, Lord Mann, then the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, undertook a big piece of work called, “Antisemitism in European football: a scar on the beautiful game”. He updated his report as the Government’s independent adviser on antisemitism, working with young football fans in association with the Holocaust Educational Trust. The report highlights some shocking examples: Nazi salutes; the use of swastikas; disgusting racist chants; and even the depiction of Anne Frank on some mock football cards.

While it is positive that some police forces and football clubs are striving to do better, others inexplicably turn a blind eye to this particular form of racism. Perhaps the title of David Baddiel’s book is especially relevant here: “Jews Don’t Count”. In the book, Baddiel talks about his own experiences as a lifelong football fan and gives some stark examples of the kind of language that Jewish fans like himself and his brother have heard on the terraces. The APPG visited Chelsea football club just before the pandemic, and it was reassuring to hear that there seems to be more recognition of the problem, and some determination to adopt a zero-tolerance policy. The adoption by Chelsea, and the English Premier League, of the IHRA definition was also welcomed by the APPG against antisemitism.

Debates such as this can and should prompt sports fans to be more alert, and perhaps call out those incidents when they see or hear them. However, even getting antisemitism included in anti-racist campaigns has been slow and extremely difficult. There are more examples of that in David Baddiel’s book. I have to declare an interest here, as my partner is currently directing the Channel 4 documentary version of the book, which will be shown in the autumn. The book contains many examples of the author finding it really hard to get anyone to take antisemitism as seriously as the other forms of racism that we are more familiar with in sport.

I hope that we will see more awareness of the issue, more being done to stop it and that football—and all sports—will be safe for everyone to enjoy, free from the fear or anticipation of any form of racist abuse.

4.47 pm

**Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. Racism in football has reduced dramatically over the last few decades. Indeed, we are thankfully in a different place to where we were in the 1970s and 1980s. However, we must be under no illusions; racism still does exist in the game, as we saw most notably following the appalling comments on social media directed at England players after our defeat in the final of last year’s Euro championships. Given the club’s long association with the Jewish community, it would be remiss of me not to refer directly to Tottenham Hotspur, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) did, when discussing antisemitism in football. I declare my interest as a proud but long-suffering Spurs fan and season ticket holder, who looks forward to being back at White Hart Lane when the season kicks off in August.

Historically, the use of the Y-word by Tottenham fans was initially taken as a positive step to deflect antisemitic abuse that they were subjected to at matches more than 40 years ago from opposition fans who faced

no sanctions for their actions. The term continues to be used to the present day by many of my fellow supporters. Tottenham, as a club, has always maintained that fans have never used the word with any deliberate attempt to offend. Spurs fans often use the word as a term of endearment towards one another, and as a defence mechanism against the antisemitic abuse that still exists in the stands today—something the club has acknowledged in the past. I know Spurs fans who are Jewish and who see the word as a term of endearment to the club’s Jewish fans and a recognition of its historic connection with the Jewish community. However, it is clear that not all Jewish supporters see the term in the same way.

The club deserves credit for starting that debate and consulting widely with its fanbase on the usage of the word. The results of the consultation have reaffirmed the club’s commitment to working with all sections of its fanbase to reduce the use of the term, and rightly so. Given how ingrained the word is among Spurs fans, that will not happen overnight—it will probably be a rather long process—but the club deserves recognition for leading that debate and engaging with its fans in the process.

It should be made clear that the use of the Y-word by Tottenham fans should never be cited as an excuse for the evil of antisemitism, both in society at large and in football. As I mentioned, the adoption of the term was a direct consequence of the lack of action when it was used against Spurs fans. In using the term, Spurs fans are universally well intentioned, but make no mistake, there is genuine antisemitism in football, and it is used with the intention of causing deliberate harm and offence.

Let me give one example. On my way to a game at the old Upton Park ground, I was in a pub with West Ham fans. After singing disparaging chants about Tottenham, those fans proceeded to hiss to imitate the evil of the holocaust, in a direct reference to Tottenham’s Jewish heritage. It was not just a few mindless idiots, but dozens of people, and it lasted a long time. From recollection, that incident happened in 2015 or 2016. We might hope that things have since improved, but as my right hon. Friend mentioned, it was only last month that an opposition supporter at Tottenham was ejected for making a Nazi salute—again, presumably in reference to the Jewish connection to our club. Those are just two examples of the continued evil of antisemitism in football, but a further example would be the use of the Israel flag by Rangers fans, which is often met with blatant antisemitism online as well.

Some great initiatives are being undertaken to deal with wider racism in football, and I commend the Government, the Football Association, the Premier League and the English Football League for leading that work, but antisemitism remains a serious issue in football and more needs to be done to combat it. I commend my right hon. Friend for securing the debate, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister about how the Government will continue to address the matter.

4.53 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is an absolute pleasure to speak in the debate. I thank the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for setting the scene so well. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) is a Spurs

[*Jim Shannon*]

supporter; I would have thought he would be a Blackpool fan. I come from outside Newtownards, so Ards FC is my home team. That does not mean that I do not support Leicester City; nor does it mean that I do not support Rangers Football Club, which I think the hon. Gentleman said he supports. On a Saturday afternoon, I always look for the three results. I have been a fan of Leicester City for 53 years, and of Rangers and Ards for probably much longer.

Sport gives us an opportunity to come together and unify our enjoyments. I have always been a football supporter—I love the game, played it at school and still follow it—so it saddens me that there are still instances of racism in sport. There is no place whatsoever for racism. I do not care if in some people's minds it is one small incident; in my mind, it is a big incident of something should never happen. The right hon. Lady should be commended for securing the debate and giving us a chance to add our comments.

We must do more to remind those who want to inflict abuse on others that we are all the same but simply different. We have the same blood in our veins and we were brought up in the same culture. Being of different religions does not make us any different, nor does having different outlooks on life. It does not make a ha'penny-bit of difference, as we would say back home.

I am very pleased to see the Minister in his place. I always genuinely enjoy hearing the Minister and I know he will give us much encouragement in this debate today, because of his nature. I look forward to the other contributions as well.

I said to the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet before the debate that I was going to mention a wee bit about what we have done in Northern Ireland. It is an example of where there are two very different sides of the community, from the Unionist and the nationalist points of view and from a religious point of view as well. I was brought up in the '60s, so the troubles were very much part of my life. There was maybe a certain sectarianism in football—you supported this team or you supported that team. That is the way it sometimes happened. The Irish Football Association took a decision to address the issue of race and identity from a very early stage. I am sure our very knowledgeable Minister will already know about the excellent work we have been doing in Northern Ireland. We have taken giant steps forward to bridge the gaps and bring the community together.

Northern Ireland youth soccer experienced much racism and hatred at one stage. There is even a short film titled "Where You Really From?" that was released in March this year, which highlights the racism around Northern Irish football. The Irish Football Association has worked extremely hard, as a collective, to create a culture worth celebrating. We must do more to encourage others to take pride in diversity and not abuse others. In Northern Ireland, inclusivity has transcended both sides of the community. We have seen massive steps forward. I put on the record my thanks to the IFA for what it has done at every level of football—the premier league, the intermediate league and the lower leagues and ordinary community football that we all grew up loving and enjoying.

I have no issue with fans having passion when it comes to sport—they should have passion for their team; but they must have respect for the others as well. I recall an incident that occurred in 2020, just after England's victory against Ukraine in the 2020 Euros. A 17-year-old boy admitted to verbally abusing a Jewish man on the London underground. Sometimes people understand they are wrong, but they still do not take the correct precautions to not say these things. Respect for others is so important, but we live in an era where racial abuse is all too common and young people see it being normalised through social media.

As the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) said, action needs to be taken not just at our level, but at European football level as well. I think of Hungary, which I mention because that team has some very right-wing fans. I am not saying that people do not have a right to hold right-wing views, but their views are disgraceful—the chants, the verbal abuse and the physical abuse have been outrageous. UEFA's way of punishing the team was to close the ground, but I will tell hon. Members the best thing to do: they should not be allowed to come to any more football matches—keep them away. That would be a better idea, rather than allowing them to come back again sometime in the future. There is a big job for Europe to do as well.

For decades, there have been multiple instances worldwide of antisemitism in sport. The Anne Frank House works tirelessly to fight the issue—it stems back to as far back as the holocaust—as issues in sport hold a special place in the organisation's heart. It held an international conference, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Health and held in the Amsterdam Arena. Yet instances of fan interaction have been witnessed in Germany where fans encourage others to remain peaceful. People often underestimate the impact fans can have on football stadiums. Unity is powerful, but it must be the correct type of unity. We can all join together and support our teams, whoever they may be, but we must have respect for others as well.

The Henry Jackson Association has stated that antisemitism has become a blight across the European continent. It certainly has; there are plenty of examples. The right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet could have gone on at some length with more examples, if time had permitted. The Premier League only adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism in December 2020. More needs to be done to address this everlasting problem. Only recently, Tottenham's chairman, Daniel Levy, was subject to antisemitic slurs, which is absolutely disgraceful, and they were not addressed—they were ignored—by the radio presenters. When these things happen, we must condemn them in the strongest terms whenever we can.

The hon. Member for Blackpool South referred to the Israeli flag. I have a small Israeli flag in my office. I keep it there all the time; it never moves because I am a proud supporter of Israel—that is not a secret. I am a member of the Friends of Israel in this place and in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I will continue to take that stance and be that voice for Israel against all the people across the world who do them down. Our modern society must drive for inclusivity at every level, and rightly so. However, on too many occasions, this inclusivity does not extend to our Jewish friends—it extends to my



Jewish friends—and society must grasp that. Those Jewish friends are as British as you and I, and that lack of inclusivity needs to be addressed. We need change, and it must begin in this House. Today's debate is one way of doing that.

5 pm

**Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Stringer, both as a neighbour and an MP covering a large and proud Jewish community. Women and men, girls and boys, northern and southern, blue and red, and religious and non-religious meet arm in arm and stand side by side at our football stadiums, supporting their beloved teams. Communities come together to passionately rally behind their sides in the hope of that everlasting and euphoric victory. There is no feeling quite like it and as a United fan, it has been a while since I have felt that feeling.

We all remember the glorious scenes across the country last summer as that inspiring England team came so close to bringing it home. However, what we saw directed at our three lions, Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka and Jadon Sancho, after the game shows that a serious and worrisome trend continues to infiltrate our games and spread like a poison across our stands. It is the poison of racism, aimed mostly at working-class black lads merely for doing the job they love.

Discrimination wherever it occurs and in whatever format needs to be rooted out and eradicated. If the abuse directed at players on pitches in this country and elsewhere is not stamped out, it will send a worrying message to the next generation of stars and spectators. That is why I was heartened to see the immense courage of Blackpool player Jake Daniels, who recently came out as gay, giving gay players a role model and normalising the fact that football is a game for everyone regardless of sexual orientation.

There is a growing trend of Jews attending games hoping to see their team defend with vigour, but instead finding themselves defending their children from racist vitriol. However, this is news to no one. Everyone knows that antisemitism has haunted the stands of British football for far too long. Antisemitism seems to be a common feature of the sport. While some clubs have shown an increasing commitment to stamping out prejudice and discrimination in their clubs through the adoption of the IHRA definition, as well as Chelsea's "Say No to Antisemitism" campaign, it seems to have had little traction as of yet.

We see examples of antisemitism in football everywhere. Tottenham Hotspur football club is, of course, home to a large Jewish population, and rival supporters have used the pejorative Y-word, as has already been mentioned, with little consequence for doing so. West Ham fans found themselves banned from attending club games after they sang antisemitic songs on a commercial flight. Arsenal fans spat at Spurs fans that they would be "gassing Jews". Even at grassroot and junior football, I have heard local reports from Maccabi of their Jewish players—some only seven years of age—being hissed at by players on the opposite side, replicating the noise of the gas chambers. I am sure that we can all agree that is truly shameful, shocking and abhorrent.

This racist abuse is widespread, though, with most Premier League clubs having witnessed antisemitic abuse within the last decade, so I am happy to contribute to

the debate to address what has been done and what remains to be done to fight this concerning trend of antisemitism and racism in British football. I am delighted to see that some clubs across the UK have taken steps to combat antisemitic behaviour among their fans as well as among their players. Clubs like Chelsea have recently been in the news for doing just that. Much more needs to be done within football and throughout wider society—indeed, other sports, too, as we saw in cricket with Azeem Rafiq and the Islamophobia that came out just last year.

Sport provides an opportunity to create new friends and be part of a community, and it teaches young people how to co-exist in diverse politics. Sports is an incredibly powerful tool. Football, in particular, reflects society, and that is why I am concerned to see examples of antisemitism during the local elections this year from Conservative candidates in my own area of Bury because, again, antisemitism needs to be rooted out from our stands, society and politics. There is no time or place for it; it has to stop.

We need to do much more to ensure that British football players can play the beautiful game without being subject to unacceptable abuse. We need tougher sanctions against offenders, action by social media companies, better education about the plight of Jews and all other races who find themselves subject to racist attacks, and a zero-tolerance policy that does not allow for repeat offenders, as well as—perhaps—policies that punish offenders retrospectively.

The normalisation of racist abuse is a significant step towards the normalisation of racist attacks. We need to be hard on this issue, otherwise we will bring about a worse situation in which our ethnic minorities are physically abused. Nipping this problem in the bud is the correct course of action in order to get back the community and family feeling at British football games, and to finally give antisemitism the two-footed slide tackle that it deserves.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend mentioned online antisemitism. I am a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Taskforce To Combat Online Antisemitism. We found that popular subjects, such as football and other sports, were being used on social media, for instance in videos, and people included things such as tropes and conspiracy theories to gradually groom and recruit people into the far right and racist gangs. And these practices actually become prevalent in sporting arenas, such as football grounds. Do we not need more to stamp that out online, so that it does not appear in the grounds?

**Christian Wakeford:** We absolutely need to do that, because if antisemitism and racism are allowed to breed online, it ultimately ends up on the streets, in our football stands and in any sporting arena, as well as—again—in our politics.

The right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) who secured this debate spoke about the great work of Lord Mann in tackling this issue. I was very fortunate to speak in a conference in Jerusalem last year about antisemitism and how it is tackled on a global scale. We heard from representatives from Hungary, from Borussia Dortmund and from Chelsea as to how they have seen antisemitism not only grow but start to be tackled. In some stands, we saw swastikas being

[*Christian Wakeford*]

flown just a couple of years ago, but those clubs are now very family-friendly, because they nipped the problem in the bud and have a zero-tolerance approach. We need to see the same on our online platforms, which is why—again—the Online Safety Bill was a fantastic opportunity. However, it has been a missed opportunity, when so much more could be done to tackle this harmful abuse online.

That is why we really need to tackle this problem. We need to tackle it seriously and make sure that it is banished to where it belongs—in the history books.

**Graham Stringer (in the Chair):** I call the Scottish National party spokesperson, who I will stop after five minutes, as I will the Labour spokesperson after I call him.

5.7 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Thank you very much for calling me to speak, Mr Stringer.

I start by congratulating the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on securing today's important debate, which comes on the 36th anniversary of one of the best moments in Scottish football history—the Diego Maradona 'Hand of God' goal in the Mexico 1986 World Cup. [*Laughter.*] I have lost the room before I have even started.

The hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) mentioned in his contribution that we have come a long way and that the racism issue is a lot better than it used to be. Obviously though, it is still a massive issue; hence today's debate. Only a few years after that goal in 1986, in the early 1990s, I remember that black players who had come up to Scotland—such as Justin Fashanu, who played for Airdrie and Hearts, and Mark Walters, who played for Rangers—were subjected to monkey chants and inflatable bananas were thrown around the crowd, and what-have-you. It was a fully horrible time to witness that behaviour. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman is right that we have made some progress. However, there is still a heck of a lot to do, which I will outline.

The right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet, who secured the debate and led it off, rightly started by referring to the horrendous racism faced by the England players last year, before going on to focus on antisemitism. She mentioned Nir Bitton, the Celtic player and Israel international, who faced antisemitic abuse following an Old Firm game. Indeed, this happens on the pitch as well. During a European game, Glen Kamara, the Rangers player and Finnish international, faced racist abuse by a player—a Czech player, I think—who was banned for 10 games. That is a rare example of UEFA actually dealing with racism appropriately. I say that because I share the view of the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), who is no longer in her place, who expressed concerns about UEFA's approach to this issue.

The hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) spoke about David Baddiel's book, "Jews Don't Count", which I have on my reading pile. I have not got round to reading it yet; it is in a pile of about 12 books in my flat. She mentioned the work of Lord Mann; I was pleased to help facilitate a meeting between Lord Mann, a

representative of Borussia Dortmund and the Scottish Sports Minister on a recent visit. The hon. Member for Blackpool South, who I have mentioned, spoke of how ingrained the Y-word is in Tottenham. I appreciate his point but I am not entirely sure that historical use is a proper justification for continued use of that word.

The hon. Member for Westminster Hall—sorry, I mean Strangford. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) proudly mentioned that he was an Ards, Leicester and Rangers fan. Indeed, having had conversations with his colleagues in the Democratic Unionist party, I think he perhaps needed to be a Rangers fan to pass the vetting. He has spoken in a number of debates on abuse, particularly abuse of a religious nature, and he has a depth of knowledge and experience, having grown up during the troubles.

My colleague on the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford), lost the crowd almost as quickly as I did at the start of my speech by announcing he was a Man United fan. He quite rightly brought up the Blackpool player Jake Daniels, who came out. In 2022, it is actually a disgrace that we have to celebrate these things. It just shows how far we have to go.

Football clubs are hugely important institutions, with vital links to the community and to people across the world. We talk of the power of sport in this country, as I think the hon. Member for Bury South did. For many people, that is football. We have to harness that power a little better than we do. Inclusion and representation matter to promote better values and tolerance of differences that may be seldom understood unless awareness and education is promoted.

Young fans are incredibly impressionable to the behaviour of footballers. I do not know whether this has been mentioned, but a 2018 CNN investigation into antisemitism in Europe found that a third of Europeans in the poll knew little or nothing about the Nazis' systematic killing of 6 million Jews. A survey carried out on behalf of the Claims Conference 2018 found that 11% of American adults were not sure they had ever even heard of the holocaust. Debates such as this and Holocaust Memorial Day are still massively important. Equality in football is essential, free from discrimination such as antisemitism and other forms of racism.

I should say that I am a St Johnstone fan, although I was brought up by my dad as a Rangers fan, but sent to a Catholic primary school. The west of Scotland is clearly not where the hon. Member for Strangford grew up, but it had—

**Graham Stringer (in the Chair):** Order. I call Jeff Smith.

5.12 pm

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) on securing the debate. We have had excellent speeches, from my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Bury South (Christian Wakeford), and across the Chamber.

We agree that football is a game that brings people together. It can break down divides, foster friendships and create a positive sense of community. But a minority of fans bring unacceptable attitudes and language. UK football policing authorities note that there was an

increase in hate crime incidents reported in stadiums in the first half of last season. After two incidents in one weekend at the end of the season, the anti-racism charity Kick It Out commented that “hate is alive and well” in the game.

According to a FIFA report, more than half the players in the most recent Euro 2020 and Africa Cup of Nations finals were abused online before, during and after the game. We remember today the appalling reaction from some England fans to England’s loss in the Euro finals and the racist targeting of Bukayo Saka, Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho. We still have a lot to do.

It is important to address antisemitism in the context of a worrying upturn in antisemitic hate crime in the UK. In recent years, as we have heard in this debate, Jewish fans have been abused at matches and Nazi salutes have been used. Antisemitic slurs are still used online in relation to football. Antisemitic chants are still sometimes sung from football stands across Europe. The authorities really need to do more to tackle that. The Antisemitism Policy Trust has documented antisemitic incidents in football internationally, but also highlights good examples of how we can respond.

Chelsea fans have been involved in several incidents of antisemitism, but the club has taken a strong stand and been praised for its response. Last year it won the King David Award from the European Jewish Association. Its “Say No to Antisemitism” campaign has been educating the clubs, players, staff, fans and community about antisemitism and football.

Another club taking action is, of course, Tottenham. This year the club urged supporters to move on from using the Y-word after consultation with fans and Jewish groups. I recently met Ashley Lerner, the chief executive of Maccabi GB—and a Spurs fan—to discuss this issue among others. Maccabi is an excellent charity that promotes British Jews’ health, wellbeing and participation in sport. The history of the Y-word at Spurs is complex. I used to go and watch Man City at White Hart Lane in the ’80s, and Spurs fans used to use the term to take ownership and as a badge of pride. However, times and attitudes change. While not all Jewish Spurs fans find the word offensive, it is widely regarded as an antisemitic slur and the majority of those surveyed by Spurs agreed it was a racist word. We support the club’s efforts to ditch the Y-word.

There are good initiatives to tackle racism more widely, such as Kick It Out, as I have mentioned. In 2020 the Football Association launched its football leadership diversity code. Last year the Premier League launched its “No room for racism” action plan, which accompanies a new equality, diversity and inclusion standard that has been applied to all clubs. These are all steps in the right direction. The fan-led review of football governance proposes an independent regulator, which Labour wants to see in place as soon as possible, that can set clear equality, diversity and inclusion standards that clubs must meet as part of their licensing conditions. However, we will not have an independent regulator until 2024 at the earliest, so what action can the Government take now to ensure that football improves efforts to tackle discrimination?

I want to mention Baroness Casey’s review of the chaos at the Euro 2020 men’s finals at Wembley. She highlighted the unacceptable racist actions of some of those present, as well as online after the match, and

called for more action. Her review, published last December, highlights some pressing issues on safety. When will the Government respond to her review?

Finally, Labour welcomes the fact that football banning orders have been extended to those who carry out online racist abuse. However, can the Minister say what conversations he is having with clubs and governing bodies about tackling the rising trend of hate crimes in stadiums? All Members present agree that antisemitism and racism have no place in our society, and they should have no place in football. We must redouble our efforts to kick them out.

**Graham Stringer (in the Chair):** Would the Minister leave a couple of minutes at the end for the proposer of the debate to wind up?

5.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for securing this important debate and all those who have participated. There is a very clear message coming from this Chamber today; it is clear from my right hon. Friend’s comments—and those of all Members who have spoken—that we all share the view that it is of the utmost importance to continue tackling the issues of antisemitism and racism in football, in sport and, indeed, in society.

That is why the Government and its arm’s length bodies, Sport England and UK Sport, have worked closely with football authorities and the sector to ensure that tackling all forms of racism and discrimination remains a priority. I am personally committed to this, as I want sport to be welcoming to everyone and a true reflection of our diverse society. It is therefore particularly disappointing to have this debate about racism, discrimination and antisemitism in football, because it is one of our most diverse sports. Indeed, many of our highest-profile stars are from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

However, as we have seen in the media and online over the past few years, there have been continued incidents of discrimination at and around football matches. Over the past year, incidents have been recorded of antisemitism and of Jewish fans being abused in the UK and across Europe. My right hon. Friend gave a rather alarming list of such incidents. Many colleagues today have mentioned the Euro 2020 finals, after which there was an increase in online abuse, in particular, and racism, indicating that this remains a serious issue in football. Over the past few years we have continued to work with football authorities to try to tackle the issue, but so much more needs to be done.

What has been done? There have been actions targeted at and around football grounds, such as improving reporting systems, providing better training and support for referees and stewards, who are often abused themselves, and improving the quality of CCTV and other equipment around stadiums. One significant action was the Government amending legislation to extend the use of football banning orders so that online abusers can be banned from stadiums for up to 10 years, ensuring that action is being taken both online and offline.

As my right hon. Friend and other Members mentioned, we hope that the Online Safety Bill, currently going through Parliament, will also help to tackle some of



[Nigel Huddleston]

these issues. One thing that I think we all find quite alarming is this. Abuse, including online abuse, is against the terms and conditions of social media companies already. The problem is that they are not always able or, I am afraid, willing to implement their own terms and conditions. That is one reason why we had to bring in that Bill.

As the national governing body for football, the FA has a responsibility to address all forms of discrimination in the game. Of course, that includes antisemitism, and I know that this is something that it does take seriously. Last year, as the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and others mentioned, the FA and the English Football League joined the Premier League in adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. That provides clear and united guidance across football on what language or actions may be considered antisemitic. The FA has issued fines and bans to players found guilty of antisemitic behaviour. It also works closely with independent bodies, such as Kick It Out, to use the vast reach of football to help educate people, in an effort to wipe out antisemitism.

**Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con):** Mercifully, I am not aware of any publicly known antisemitism regarding Woking football club and similar clubs in the locality, but in 2017 there was a small graffiti war, played out on walls and garage doors in Woking, that contained a lot of antisemitism, and that was from rival Polish football fans. As well as attacking things domestically, will we use our positions in UEFA and FIFA—we have a World cup coming—to ensure that the IHRA definition is also imposed internationally and that our international friends also take this matter really seriously?

**Nigel Huddleston:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Of course, we do try, both as a Government and in the sporting bodies and entities whose voice carries a lot of weight internationally. The UK sport bodies are generally quite highly regarded and respected and show great leadership on these issues. I would certainly encourage them to continue those conversations and that dialogue with the international bodies, so that they follow the leadership that is sometimes shown in the UK. When I meet Sport Ministers from the G20 and the G7 around the world, these are precisely the kinds of issues that we raise. I am sorry to hear about the incident that my hon. Friend became aware of.

Other bodies are working on this issue too. An example is the Premier League. We welcome the Premier League's No Room For Racism action plan and the announcement of new enhanced anti-discrimination measures such as league-wide bans for offenders. In June 2020, the league launched a dedicated reporting system for players, managers, coaches and their family members, which has proven successful in pursuing legal action against offenders.

I think that this is an important point to emphasise—my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet mentioned it in her speech. This offence and abuse can be a hate crime, which is illegal, and can be and often is pursued in the courts. It is not banter; it is not something to be taken trivially. It can and should lead to pursuits in the courts. The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), also

made the important point that times change and attitudes change, and it is not really an excuse to say, "Oh, well, we used to do this in the past." My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) also raised this issue. What was perhaps not intended or perceived to be offensive in the past can be now.

We need to be very conscious of the difference between intent in using certain words and behaviours, and the impact that it has on people. I think that is very important in this debate as well. Even where action may not be intended to be abusive or offensive, the reality is that it can be, and there is a responsibility on individuals, governing bodies and clubs to communicate that it can be and is offensive to their fanbase.

We know that there is still a lot more to do across football as a whole. The fan-led review of football governance, which the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington mentioned, recommended that the football authorities work even more closely to ensure consistent campaigns across the various organisations. The Government are pleased that the Premier League, the FA and the EFL have agreed to collaborate on an overarching campaign for equality, diversity and inclusion across football, with Kick It Out. As suggested by the review, we will explore a new, single repository for reports of discrimination—more on this will likely be coming in the White Paper in the coming months. The Government will continue to work closely with all football authorities on this issue.

We know that it is not only football that is facing these challenges. In June 2021, Sport England, UK Sport and the other home nations' sports councils all published the results of a detailed, independent review of tackling racism and racial inequality in sport. The review brought together data and gathered lived experiences of racial inequalities and racism in the sector. The findings make it clear that racism and racial inequalities still exist within sport in the UK. The sports councils agreed on a set of overarching commitments, and they will work together. Updates on progress are being provided every six months, and I am keen to ensure that this momentum is sustained over the long term.

The updated code places an increased focus on diversity in decision making and ensuring that sports organisations reflect more accurately the communities they serve. The code now requires sports organisations to produce individual diversity and inclusion plans. These have to be agreed by Sport England and/or UK Sport, they have to be published, and they have to be updated annually, so there is positive action there. Diversity and inclusion is absolutely essential to sport. We want people to enjoy taking part in their chosen activity, and we want to attract and retain talented athletes from all backgrounds. That cannot happen if people do not feel welcomed or respected.

Let me briefly address a couple of other points raised by colleagues before I conclude. A couple of hon. Members raised the issue of penalties, particularly in international competitions. That is an important point and again one that we discuss, because penalties for bad behaviour by fans are the responsibility of the clubs. The clubs need to be punished accordingly, and that punishment needs to be effective and needs to hurt. I will always back what some might see as quite tough punishment, but it

is needed because we need to take these issues seriously and take every action to make sure the clubs take it seriously.

It should go without saying that there is no place for racism, sexism, homophobia, or any other kind of discrimination in football or sport more widely. We have heard that loud and clear from all colleagues today. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet has raised many important points, and I sincerely thank her for her interest and passion in this subject. Indeed, it is something that she has spoken about eloquently for many, many years. There is still more to do, but she has my assurance that the Government are committed to continuing to work with football authorities to combat racism, discrimination and antisemitism, both in person and online, from the grassroots to the boardroom.

5.28 pm

**Theresa Villiers:** This has been a really good debate. There was, I think, universal acceptance that the situation is much improved from the dark days of the '70s, but also that antisemitism and racism is still a serious problem in football, and that we want the football establishment to take it more seriously and to be more active in dealing with the problem, not least because it is so influential on the younger generation.

We also had a chance to look at the particular complexities of the situation at Spurs. It was disturbing to hear of the abuse directed at supporters of that club. We also heard from the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) about the role of international footballing associations in cracking down on this problem. I welcome the Minister's assurances that the Online Safety Bill will crack down on the social media companies to ensure that they take this more seriously and police their own terms and conditions.

But what I was most disturbed by was the example cited by the hon. Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford). The idea of people making hissing noises at seven-year-old Jewish footballers is just revolting. It is profoundly disturbing and is a real illustration of how antisemitism remains a serious problem in football in our society. I am pleased to have had the chance to table this debate to ensure that we as a House make it clear that this kind of conduct is utterly and completely unacceptable.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered antisemitism and other forms of racism in football.

5.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*





# Written Statements

Wednesday 22 June 2022

## LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

### Homes for Ukraine Update

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (Michael Gove):** The Homes for Ukraine scheme will allow eligible children and minors under the age of 18 who have already applied through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to come to the UK without a parent or guardian, the Government announced today, 22 June 2022.

This policy will initially apply to the 1,000 children who have already applied to the Home Office but are unable to travel as they are not travelling or reuniting with a parent or guardian.

After working closely with the Ukrainian Government, the changes will enable a child to apply for a visa if they have proof of parental consent. This must be certified by an authority approved by the Ukrainian Government such as notary authorities or Ukrainian consul abroad.

Extensive sponsor checks will also be carried out by local authorities ahead of any visa being granted, with councils able to veto any sponsor arrangements they deem unsuitable.

The sponsor should also, except in exceptional circumstances, be someone who is personally known to the parents.

The Government are working with the Ukrainian Government, devolved Administrations, local authorities and charities and voluntary groups.

[HCWS123]

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### The Electricity and Gas (Energy Company Obligation) Order 2022

**The Minister for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change (Greg Hands):** My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Callanan) has today made the following statement:

Upgrading our homes to be more energy efficient is the best long-term solution for reducing our energy costs, keeping ourselves warm and healthy in winter and tackling fuel poverty. It is also essential for our transition to net zero and in supporting local jobs and growth. This is why the Energy Company Obligation scheme remains a key policy in supporting low income and vulnerable households to upgrade their homes with energy efficiency and heating measures.

Making homes more energy efficient reduces heating costs permanently, mitigating the impacts of current and future price rises. There are wider benefits; energy efficient homes are more comfortable to live in, with consequent improvements to householder's health and wellbeing.

The Energy Company Obligation has a good track record of delivering such upgrades to homes. Since 2013, it has installed around 3.5 million energy efficiency measures in 2.4 million homes across Great Britain.

In April, we published the response to the consultation on the future of the Energy Company Obligation across Great Britain, committing to an expansion of the scheme from £640 million to £1 billion a year and extending it by four years to 2026. Today the Government have laid the regulations for the scheme.

The last iteration of the Energy Company Obligation scheme, EC03, came to an end on 31 March 2022 and since 1 April 2022, EC03 measures could continue to be delivered to previous scheme rules—subject to some exceptions—until 30 June 2022. Similarly, suppliers have had the option to deliver to the new scheme, EC04, rules from 1 April 2022.

EC04 will be focused on low-income and vulnerable households in Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band D-G homes. The scheme will bring positive value to society, with estimated installations of around 800,000 measures in around 450,000 homes. Households could save on average £290 annually off their energy bills over the lifetime, or up to £1,600 in the least energy efficient homes. However, those savings could average £600 next winter. 360,000 homes will be upgraded to EPC Band C, helping more households out of fuel poverty.

Government will mandate minimum energy efficiency improvements requiring Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band F and G homes to be improved to a minimum Band D and Band D and E homes to be improved to a minimum Band C, contributing to our statutory fuel poverty target and interim milestone.

To make greater progress on upgrading the least energy efficient homes, there is a minimum target of upgrading 150,000 Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band E, F and G private tenure homes. This will ensure the least energy efficient homes are not left behind. Furthermore, a minimum target of 90,000 solid wall insulation measures is introduced to maintain the focus on insulating harder to treat homes, while supporting the solid wall insulation industry.

Under the scheme, support for repairs and replacements of broken gas and electric storage heating systems will be limited to 5,000 homes per year and the repair of inefficient oil and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) systems will be permitted as a last resort where renewable heating cannot be installed. This will ensure measures installed under EC04 align with the Government's Heat and Buildings Strategy and net zero targets.

Homes in off-gas rural areas will be incentivised in Scotland and Wales, to ensure homes that may be harder to reach and more expensive to deliver are not left behind. EC04 has been designed to complement the Home Upgrade Grant in off-gas homes in England, social housing funding and the private rented sector regulations. It will continue to work alongside existing energy efficiency and fuel poverty policies in Scotland and Wales.

Up to 50% of a supplier's obligation may be delivered under the reformed Flexible Eligibility mechanism (EC04 Flex), an increase from 25% under the previous scheme. EC04 Flex enables local authorities, the Scottish and Welsh Governments and energy suppliers to target and refer other low-income households who may not be in receipt of means tested benefits.

A new scoring methodology will be introduced, providing greater support to the worst performing homes. Support will continue for new and innovative installation methods and measures via a reformed innovation measure mechanism. Only fully tested measures with adequate consumer protection will be eligible.

This expansion of the scheme forms part of the wider support package to help households with rising energy bills.

In May, in recognition of increased cost of living and continued rising energy costs, a package of support worth £37 billion was announced, which includes the Energy Bills Support Scheme. Most vulnerable households will receive at least £1,200 of support this year and, all households will receive a £400 grant as a credit from energy suppliers from October 2022 onwards, which does not need to be repaid.

[HCWS125]

**CABINET OFFICE****LGBT Veterans Review**

**The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty):** The pre-2000 ban on LGBT personnel serving in the armed forces was totally wrong. In January this year, the Government committed to deliver an independent review to properly look at the lasting impact that this ban has on veterans today. The purpose of the review is to make evidence-based recommendations as to how the Government can meet their commitment in the veterans strategy to ensure the experience of LGBT veterans who were affected by the ban is understood, and their service valued.

Such a review requires the right person to lead it and, after careful consideration, the Prime Minister has appointed Lord Etherton PC QC as independent Chair. The review will begin with immediate effect. It will conclude with a final report being presented to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Steve Barclay) and the Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace) no later than 25 May 2023. The full terms of reference for the review can be found attached.

Attachments can be viewed online at:  
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2022-06-22/HCWS126>

**DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT****Shared Rural Network**

**The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure (Julia Lopez):** I wish to inform the House that I have today laid a departmental minute recording the Government's proposal to enter into an agreement to indemnify Digital Mobile Spectrum Ltd—a subsidiary of four mobile network operators—in respect of costs that may arise if there is a change in the operator of the Emergency Services Network.

The proposed indemnity will be reported as a contingent liability in line with the HM Treasury Contingent Liability Framework and managed in accordance with "Managing Public Money" (MPM).

The shared rural network is the Government's £1 billion deal with four mobile network operators to deliver 4G coverage to 95% of UK landmass by the end of the programme. The Government are investing over £500 million to target hard-to-reach areas where there is currently no 4G mobile coverage from any mobile network operator. The Government funded element of the programme includes upgrades to extended area service mobile telephone masts being built as part of the Home Office's emergency services network.

As set out in the minute, the proposed indemnity would cover costs of up to £15.2 million which may be required for additional equipment and operating expenses should the terms of a future emergency services network contract cause additional costs to be incurred by mobile network operators in order for them to operate their mobile network in accordance with shared rural network requirements. Any costs incurred as a result of the indemnity will be funded from within shared rural network programme approved funding.

A copy of the departmental minute will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS122]

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE****Correction to PQ118520, PQ118521 and PQ118522**

**The Minister for Health (Edward Argar):** On 28 February 2022, the Department answered three parliamentary questions asked by Nick Smith MP. The single answer given to all three questions included an incorrect reference to a supplier of PPE.

The questions were:

"118520: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department paid £600 million to Unispace Global Ltd for the purchase of personal protective equipment in 2020."

"118521: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether Unispace Global Ltd met its contractual obligations for providing adequate personal protective equipment under the contractual terms set by his Department in 2020."

"118522: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether any Government Department has taken steps to investigate why payments made to Unispace Global Ltd were not reported by that company in its financial accounts; and, if he will make a statement."

The departmental answer was:

"...Unispace Global partially met its contractual obligations, supplying the National Health Service with £484 million items of PPE from April 2020 till December 2021. We are working with the company on a commercial resolution for the remainder of the contract..."

However, all contracts between Unispace Global Ltd and the Department for Health and Social Care were novated to Unispace Health Products LLP in December 2020, which has since changed its name to Sante Global LLP. Accordingly, the departmental answer should have referred to Sante Global LLP rather than Unispace Ltd.

Through this written ministerial statement I am correcting this error, which arose as one of our internal record management systems had not been updated to reflect the change in name. This system has also been updated.

[HCWS128]

**Monkeypox Update**

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid):** The United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) yesterday published its updated vaccination strategy in response to the current monkeypox outbreak.

Based on the currently available vaccine supply, UKHSA recommends that the available doses of the vaccine should be used for a selective vaccine strategy with the aim of interrupting transmission in the subset of individuals at increased risk. This approach is supported by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

Although anyone can contract monkeypox, data from the latest outbreak shows higher levels of transmission within, but not exclusive to, the social networks of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM). Therefore, the updated strategy recommends that vaccination should be offered as soon as feasible to GBMSM at highest risk. Targeted pre-exposure vaccination is also recommended for others, including healthcare workers who are at high risk of exposure.

In view of the current epidemiology and vaccine supply available, wider vaccination in low-risk GBMSM individuals or the general population is not advised at this time.

NHS England is due to set out details on how eligible people can get vaccinated shortly.

To see the full updated strategy, which includes details of the recommendations for both pre and post-exposure vaccination, please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/monkeypox-outbreak-vaccination-strategy>.

[HCWS130]

### UK Life Sciences

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid):** The life sciences have played an essential role in helping us to learn to live with covid-19. The UK's natural strengths, and our world-beating vaccine programme, have allowed us to lead the way in this. As we learn the lessons of covid-19, it is essential that we take steps to further strengthen UK life sciences and our resilience against both future threats and a possible future resurgence in covid-19.

To date over £380 million has been invested to secure and scale up the UK's vaccine manufacturing capabilities and we have ambitious plans to invest more alongside industry to further our domestic vaccine resilience. As announced in the spending review in October 2021, the Government have now made available £9.6 billion for key covid-19 programmes and related health spending and continues to work closely with industry to ensure our life sciences sector thrives.

Looking to the future, we are determined to take action to secure further investment into the UK's thriving life science industry and cement our position as a science superpower. To that end, the Government have agreed a detailed heads of terms with Moderna to create a strategic partnership over the next decade. A binding contract will be negotiated with Moderna over the coming weeks and, subject to approval of a full business case, will be in place by early Autumn. The proposed partnership, led by the vaccine taskforce, will strengthen domestic mRNA capability and better equip the UK to respond to covid-19 and future health emergencies.

Moderna would establish their global research & development centre in the UK as part of an R&D strategic partnership, siting R&D capability onshore, with academic and wider vaccine ecosystem engagement, including extensive use of the clinical trials network in the UK. Their facilities would support vaccines not just against covid-19 but other diseases such as flu and RSV. The industry-leading, future-proof design of the plant will permit the addition of capability to manufacture a wide range of medicines and will be a massive boost to the UK's R&D capability. The site will also allow the UK to be better prepared in the event of future health emergencies. The project, which will provide an important boost to the local economy and to the country's life sciences sector, was developed with the support and collaboration of the vaccine taskforce and will be a key investment to bring novel technologies and pandemic resilience onshore in the UK.

A consistent and resilient supply of covid-19 vaccines will be critical in protecting against a possible future resurgence in covid-19, ensuring jabs are provided in

time to protect those who are most vulnerable to serious covid-19. That is why one of the objectives given to the vaccine taskforce was to strengthen the UK's onshoring capacity and capability in vaccine development, manufacturing and the supply chain to provide resilience for future pandemics.

Moderna has demonstrated expertise in mRNA development and has offered a strategic partnership with Her Majesty's Government under which it would invest in a new state of the art manufacturing facility in the UK for the production of respiratory vaccines. This would be capable of accelerating production, with UK priority access, in the event of a future health emergency.

[HCWS131]

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE

#### Gulf Co-operation Council Trade Negotiations Update

**The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** Today I am formally launching free trade negotiations between the UK and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where I am meeting the GCC Secretary General, His Excellency Dr Nayef Falah M. Al-Hajraf, and Ministers from the six GCC member states.

In line with our commitments to scrutiny and transparency, the Department for International Trade has published, and placed in the House Libraries, more information on these negotiations. This includes:

- The UK's strategic case for a UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

- Our objectives for the negotiations.

- A summary of the UK's public consultation on trade with the GCC.

- A scoping assessment, providing a preliminary economic assessment of the impact of the agreement.

The Gulf Co-operation Council represents Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These six countries are home to 54 million people and have a collective economy of £1.2 trillion.<sup>[1]</sup>

The GCC is equivalent to the UK's seventh largest export market, and total trade was worth £33.1 billion in 2021. An FTA would be a substantial opportunity for both our economies and a significant moment in the UK-GCC relationship. It will grow the economy, support jobs and the levelling up agenda.

Government analysis shows that an FTA is expected to increase trade by at least 16%, add at least £1.6 billion a year to the UK economy and contribute an additional £600 million or more to annual UK workers' wages.

All regions and nations of the UK are set to benefit from a trade deal with the GCC, supporting the Government's levelling up agenda. Industries outside of London are expected to benefit most, with the east midlands, west midlands, north-east and Yorkshire and the Humber in line for the greatest proportional gains.<sup>[2]</sup>

The GCC countries are undergoing a period of economic change and they all have ambitious vision strategies, which highlight areas for future economic growth and development. Demand for international products and



services is expected to grow rapidly to £800 billion by 2035, a 35% increase, which will create significant opportunities for UK firms. Now is the time to strike an ambitious and modern trade deal.

A strong trading relationship will allow the UK to play to our strengths as a manufacturing powerhouse and a world leader in technology, cyber, life sciences, creative industries, education, AI, financial services and renewable energy.

UK businesses in these industries have a role to play in supporting the GCC countries as they diversify their economies to move away from a reliance on fossil fuels and towards knowledge-based and green economies. The UAE, for example, has set a target of generating 50% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2050.

UK goods exporters could benefit from reduced or zero tariffs, making their products more competitive in the GCC market. For example, UK clothing, ceramics and wind turbine parts currently face tariffs of up to 15%. British farmers and food and drink producers can also benefit from new export opportunities for products, including cereals—up to 25% tariff—and chocolate—up to 15% tariff—since the GCC countries import virtually all of their food.<sup>[1]</sup>

The UK and GCC countries share an important investment partnership, with at least £30 billion already invested in each other's economies, and an FTA will help to strengthen this even further. This will support jobs throughout the UK and the GCC countries.

The UK will continue to uphold our high environmental, labour, food safety and animal welfare standards in our trade agreement with the GCC.

The first round of FTA negotiations will take place over the summer. As negotiations progress, I will ensure that parliamentarians, UK citizens and businesses are provided with regular updates.

<sup>[1]</sup> IMF estimate for 2021, World Economic Outlook April 2022.

<sup>[2]</sup> Based on the percentage increases in the scoping assessment.

<sup>[3]</sup> Tariffs in these sectors are mostly 5% across the GCC where in some cases individual countries charge higher tariffs on specific products. Note that tariffs on chocolate does not include products containing alcohol.

[HCWS127]

### UK-Ukraine Infrastructure Summit

**The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** On Friday 17 June, we hosted a UK-Ukraine infrastructure summit in London. The summit, with Prime Minister of Ukraine, Denys Shmyhal, and Minister of Infrastructure of Ukraine, Olexandr Kubrakov, brought together Ukrainian Ministers and business leaders for talks on rebuilding Ukraine after the conflict and ensuring its long-term prosperity.

Discussions identified where UK companies have world-class skills that can support reconstruction efforts—such as digital infrastructure, water and sanitation, energy, homes, and transport.

During the summit, we signed a memorandum of understanding with Ukraine which set out elements of UK support for reconstruction efforts and established a joint taskforce, which will help build partnerships between UK and Ukrainian businesses to assist the reconstruction of infrastructure in and around Kyiv.

The taskforce will support greater collaboration between the UK's world-class infrastructure, energy, and transport companies and Ukrainian public organisations and private sector businesses. This will help plan for the future as well as repairing damaged and destroyed infrastructure, including transport systems, homes, and bridges more efficiently, safely and sustainably.

The UK has already committed to provide a combined economic, humanitarian, and military support package to Ukraine worth over \$3 billion. UK Export Finance has also pledged to retain its £3.5 billion-worth of financial support for trade to Ukraine—helping the country to fund its reconstruction projects and allowing UK exporters and Ukrainian buyers to access the finance they need to trade commercially.

The UK has introduced one of the largest and most severe packages of economic sanctions against Russia. Measures cover over £4 billion-worth of products that are traded with Russia, 1,000 individuals and 100 entities in key sectors such as defence, crippling Putin's war machine.

We also announced changes to trade remedy measures relating to the conflict. This includes reallocating ringfenced market access for steel imports from Russia and Belarus to other countries, including Ukraine.

The UK will do everything in its power to support Ukraine's brave fight against Russia's unprovoked invasion and to ensure its long-term security and prosperity.

[HCWS124]

## JUSTICE

### Bill of Rights

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Dominic Raab):** Today the Government are delivering on our manifesto commitment to overhaul the Human Rights Act and replace it with a Bill of Rights, which I am introducing to Parliament today.

This country has a long and proud tradition of freedom which our Bill of Rights will enhance, for example, in respect of free speech and recognition of the role of jury trial. Equally, over the years mission creep has resulted in human rights law being used for more and more purposes, with elastic interpretations that go way beyond anything that the architects of the convention had in mind and have not been subject to democratic, legislative oversight. Following the Government's consultation on the Bill of Rights, our reforms will curtail the abuses of human rights, restore some common sense to our justice system, and ensure that our human rights framework meets the needs of the society it serves.

I am grateful to the chair and panel of the Independent Human Rights Act Review for their valuable report, which has influenced and informed our thinking in preparing both our consultation and the final Bill.

The measures in the Bill of Rights will:

1. Strengthen the right to freedom of speech. We are attaching greater weight to freedom of speech, defined as the exchange of ideas, opinions, information and facts, as a matter of utmost public interest, and widen the responsibility for attaching this greater weight to all public authorities.
2. Recognise the right to jury trial. The Bill recognises the right to trial by jury under, and subject to, the framework set by Parliament and the Scottish and Northern Ireland legislatures.

3. Clarify the interpretation of certain rights. Human rights, especially Article 8, have been used to frustrate the deportation of criminals. The Bill provides clearer criteria for the UK courts in interpreting rights and balancing them with the interests of society in particular in the context of deportation of foreign national offenders. This will restore credibility to the system and ensure we can protect the public by deporting those who pose a serious threat.

4. Reduce burdens on public authorities. We are stopping the imposition of positive obligations on our public services without proper democratic oversight. We will make clear that when public authorities are giving clear effect to primary legislation, they are not acting unlawfully. We will do this by restricting UK courts' power to interpret legislation, as we propose to do for section 3 above. This will deliver greater certainty for public services to do the jobs entrusted to them, without the constant threat of having to defend against expensive human rights claims.

5. Ensure that public protection is given due regard in interpretation of rights. The Bill contains a provision that obliges all those who interpret convention rights to consider the need to reduce the risk to the public from convicted criminals serving a custodial sentence. This will support the Government's proposed reforms to the Parole Board and strengthen the Government's hand in fighting Article 8 claims from terrorists opposing their placement in separation centres.

6. Limit the Bill's territorial jurisdiction. Domestic and Strasbourg case law has extended beyond the intent of the convention's drafters. The Bill excludes extraterritorial jurisdiction for military operations abroad.

7. Implement a permission stage to ensure trivial cases do not undermine public confidence in human rights. The introduction of a permission stage will ensure that courts focus on serious human rights claims and places responsibility on the claimant to demonstrate that they have suffered a significant disadvantage before a human rights claim can be heard in court.

8. Recognise that responsibilities exist alongside rights. We are recognising that responsibilities exist alongside rights and ensuring that the appropriateness of paying damages to those who have infringed the rights of others are considered.

9. Strengthen domestic institutions and the primacy of UK law. The Bill empowers UK courts to apply human rights in a UK context, affirming the Supreme Court's independence from the Strasbourg Court. It will make explicit that the UK Supreme Court is the ultimate judicial arbiter.

10. Increase democratic oversight. The Bill makes sure that the balance between our domestic institutions is right, by repealing section 3 to ensure that UK courts can no longer alter legislation contrary to its ordinary meaning and the overall purpose of the law.

11. Enhance Parliament's role in responding to adverse Strasbourg rulings. The Bill enhances the role of Parliament in responding to adverse Strasbourg judgments against the UK. The Bill also affirms Parliament's supremacy in the making of laws.

The issues addressed by the Bill of Rights affect the whole of the UK, and any changes must be made on a UK-wide basis. We will ensure that the framework applies equally, whilst also allowing for difference in how the framework is applied and implemented across the UK. During the consultation period I visited Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland to discuss our proposals and we will continue to engage with the devolved Administrations, civil society and relevant stakeholders across the UK.

The Bill and all of its supporting documentation is available at: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3227> copies of which have been presented to Parliament.

[HCWS129]





# Ministerial Correction

*Wednesday 22 June 2022*

## TRANSPORT

### Industrial Action on the Railway

*The following is an extract from the statement on 20 June 2022.*

**Olivia Blake:** To declare an interest, my father-in-law is a train driver and a member of the RMT. I am saddened that from the Government Benches we are not hearing the same loving rhetoric towards our railway staff that we did during the pandemic. The Secretary of State called our railway workers heroes. What has changed, and why will he not get around the negotiating table and see what he can do?

**Grant Shapps:** I wish the hon. Lady's relation well in his job, and I hope he can get back to it very soon. I have just explained that this Government are putting £96 billion into northern powerhouse rail, £35 billion into upgrades and more money into the restoring your railway fund.

*[Official Report, 20 June 2022, Vol. 716, c. 577.]*

*Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps).*

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake).

The correct response should have been:

**Grant Shapps:** I wish the hon. Lady's relation well in his job, and I hope he can get back to it very soon. I have just explained that this Government are **investing £96 billion for the integrated rail plan for the north and midlands, including northern powerhouse rail**, and more money into the restoring your railway fund.



# ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 22 June 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b> .....	825	<b>PRIME MINISTER</b> .....	834
Cost of Living .....	832	Engagements .....	834
NI Protocol Bill: Discussions with the EU .....	831	Post box in Hayfield .....	930
Northern Ireland Protocol Negotiations .....	828		
Trade between NI and rest of UK .....	825		

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 22 June 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY</b> .....	35WS	<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—continued</b>	
The Electricity and Gas (Energy Company Obligation) Order 2022 .....	35WS	Monkeypox Update .....	38WS
		UK Life Sciences .....	39WS
<b>CABINET OFFICE</b> .....	37WS	<b>INTERNATIONAL TRADE</b> .....	40WS
LGBT Veterans Review .....	37WS	Gulf Co-operation Council Trade Negotiations Update .....	40WS
		UK-Ukraine Infrastructure Summit .....	41WS
<b>DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT</b> .....	37WS	<b>JUSTICE</b> .....	42WS
Shared Rural Network .....	37WS	Bill of Rights .....	42WS
<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE</b> .....	38WS	<b>LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES</b> .....	35WS
Correction to PQ118520, PQ118521 and PQ118522 .....	38WS	Homes for Ukraine Update .....	35WS

# MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Wednesday 22 June 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>TRANSPORT</b> .....	7MC
Industrial Action on the Railway .....	7MC



No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than  
Wednesday 29 June 2022**

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Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

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## CONTENTS

**Wednesday 22 June 2022**

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 825] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*  
*Prime Minister*

**Bill of Rights [Col. 845]**

*Statement—(Dominic Raab)*

**EU Retained Law [Col. 866]**

*Statement—(Mr Rees-Mogg)*

**Bill of Rights [Col. 879]**

*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Social Security (Additional Payments) Bill [Col. 882]**

*Motion for Second Reading—(Dr Coffey)—agreed to*  
*Considered in Committee; not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed*

**Speaker's Conference [Col. 925]**

*Motion—(Mark Spencer)—agreed to*

**Petition [Col. 930]**

**VAT on Defibrillators [Col. 932]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Health and Personal Social Services [Col. 939]**

*Motion, on a deferred Division, agreed to*

**Westminster Hall**

**Homes for Ukraine: Child Refugees [Col. 341WH]**

**UK Defence Industry: Procurement [Col. 365WH]**

**NHS Dentistry in England [Col. 373WH]**

**Building Safety Remediation: Leaseholders [Col. 397WH]**

**Antisemitism and Other Racism in Football [Col. 405WH]**

*General Debates*

**Written Statements [Col. 35WS]**

**Ministerial Correction [Col. 7MC]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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